Harvard Business Review
Special Issue

The Best of HBR
Summer 2023
HBR.org

How to Overcome Impostor Syndrome

Boost your **confidence**, build your **credibility**, and lead more **authentically**.

SMEG
SMEG
SMEG
SMEG
SMEG
SMEG

smeg.com

You're not smart enough for this job.

EVERYONE ELSE ON the team knows more about how to do the work. They're going to figure out your promotion was a mistake.

The term "impostor phenomenon" was first applied to this mindset in a 1978 study of high-performing women. That study and others that followed have shown that many ambitious leaders experience overwhelming worries that they aren't qualified for their work. This anxiety exacts a mental and physical toll—and often results in toxic behaviors that harm their organizations. Tough on themselves and others, these individuals often become intimidating, perfectionistic, and abrasive.

Over the years HBR has offered a healthy crop of advice for leaders on how to combat these feelings of inadequacy. Getting perspectives from mentors, bosses, and colleagues can help you acknowledge your successes and dispel perfectionism. Asking good questions can help you learn and gain confidence faster. (You'll find this advice and more in this issue.)

But should it be up to you alone to fix this problem? It didn't escape our notice as we were assembling this collection that most of our articles on this topic were written by women and people of color, groups traditionally marginalized in the power structures of corporations. In their landmark article "Stop Telling Women They Have Impostor Syndrome" (also in this issue) Ruchika Tulshyan and Jodi-Ann Burey name the culpability of the system—or the company—in which the individual experiences these feelings. It's inescapable: Bias and exclusion logically foster self-doubt.

Of course, anyone can feel like they're faking it. But surely organizations have a role to play in cultivating a sense of equity and belonging among all their people. And all of us have a responsibility to play this out in our interpersonal behaviors—combating bias, sponsoring our colleagues, and offering praise when it is due—to keep one another's self-doubt at bay.

– The Editors

Let’s move forward while circling back.

Let’s GO further

Supporting circularity[1] by keeping materials in use

Food packaging plays an essential role in feeding people throughout the world, but when it is not collected and recycled, it can be a source of waste[2]. In places where collection infrastructures are still being built, we’re teaming up with stakeholders to improve collection, sorting and recycling – and we design our carton packages to increase the fibre content and use of recycled materials. Let’s not settle for what we can achieve today. Let’s go further together.

Go nature. Go carton.

Learn more about how we contribute to circularity at
gonaturegocarton.tetrapak.com

1. Circular economy as defined by Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (2022). ***Circular Economy Introduction.*** Source: ellenmacarthurfoundation.org.
2. Marsh, J. (2021, May 3). ***Food Packaging Waste Statistics: Understanding the Rise of Food Packaging Waste.*** Source: Environment.co.

Tetra Pak®
PROTECTS WHAT’S GOOD

SUMMER 2023

Contents

MICHELLE D'URBANO

Fix the System

The Dangers of Feeling Like a Fake | 10
Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries

I'm Not an Impostor—So Why Do I Feel Like One? | 20
LeRon L. Barton

Helping an Employee Overcome Their Self-Doubt | 22
Tara Sophia Mohr

Four Ways to Combat Impostor Syndrome on Your Team | 24
Richard Gardner and Jeff Bednar

Stop Telling Women They Have Impostor Syndrome | 26
Ruchika Tulshyan and Jodi-Ann Burey

End Impostor Syndrome in Your Workplace | 29
Ruchika Tulshyan and Jodi-Ann Burey

Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders? | 34
Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic

Culled by the editors of *Harvard Business Review* from the magazine's rich archives, these articles are written by some of the world's leading management scholars and practitioners. To help busy leaders apply the concepts in our feature-length articles, they are accompanied by "Idea in Brief" summaries.

Cover photograph by **THE VOORHES/GALLERY STOCK**

NEW PROGRAM

THE EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR PRIVATE COMPANIES

THINK CHICAGO BOOTH

Designed to address a Private Company's Challenges, Opportunities, and Performance

Private companies have unique ownership structures, distinctive cultures, and often face governance challenges as they expand. Only one school—The University of Chicago Booth School of Business—has responded with an executive education program to help executives from private companies address today's challenges and prepare for tomorrow's opportunities.

The Executive Development Program for Private Companies provides the management tools to develop sustainable private sector-led growth. You will explore critical levers to enhance sustainable growth while retaining what matters to your private company. Participants will examine various private company ownership structures, succession planning, talent acquisition strategies, and unique governance challenges and opportunities.

Chicago Booth is where intellectual rigor, engaging teaching, and cutting-edge research meet. As a result, participants have transformational experiences and become empowered, impactful leaders. Learn more at ChicagoBooth.edu/EDP-Private and empower your organization with The Chicago Approach™.

THE EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR PRIVATE COMPANIES

Gleacher Center

Program Dates
October 16–20,2023

Contact us for a consultation at +1 312.464.8732, exec.ed@chicagobooth.edu, ChicagoBooth.edu/EDP-Private

CHICAGO BOOTH | Executive Education

CHICAGO LONDON HONG KONG

Our Commitment to Sustainability
We're proud that the paper we use in our print magazine is certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® program, meaning that it comes from responsibly managed sources and is a renewable resource.

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE
Certified Sourcing
www.sfiprogram.org
SFI-00993

Boost Your Confidence

How High Achievers Overcome Their Anxiety | 38
Morra Aarons-Mele

In Praise of the Incomplete Leader | 44
Deborah Ancona, Thomas W. Malone, Wanda J. Orlikowski, and Peter M. Senge

You're Not an Impostor. You're Actually Pretty Amazing. | 54
Kess Eruteya

Why It's OK to Be an Impostor | 57
Amanda Reill

How to Make Friends with Your Inner Impostor | 58
Amantha Imber

Choose Courage over Confidence | 61
Christie Hunter Arscott

Everyone Suffers from Impostor Syndrome—Here's How to Handle It | 63
Andy Molinsky

The One Skill That Helped Me Grow in My Career | 64
Tapan Singhel

Confidence Doesn't Always Boost Performance | 66
Gardiner Morse

Build Your Credibility

Becoming the Boss | 70
Linda A. Hill

Stretch Responsibilities | 80
An podcast interview with Jerry Colonna, hosted by Alison Beard and Dan McGinn

How to Gain Credibility When You Have Little Experience | 88
Andy Molinsky and Jake Newfield

If You Want to Lead, Master This Skill | 90
Dina Denham Smith

Three Rules for Experts Who Want More Influence | 92
Dorie Clark

Be Yourself

The Authenticity Paradox | 94
Herminia Ibarra

Lead with Authenticity | 102
A podcast interview with Tina Opie and Candice Morgan, hosted by Amy Bernstein, Sarah Green Carmichael, and Nicole Torres

The Authenticity Trap for Workers Who Are Not Straight White Men | 110
Sylvia Ann Hewlett

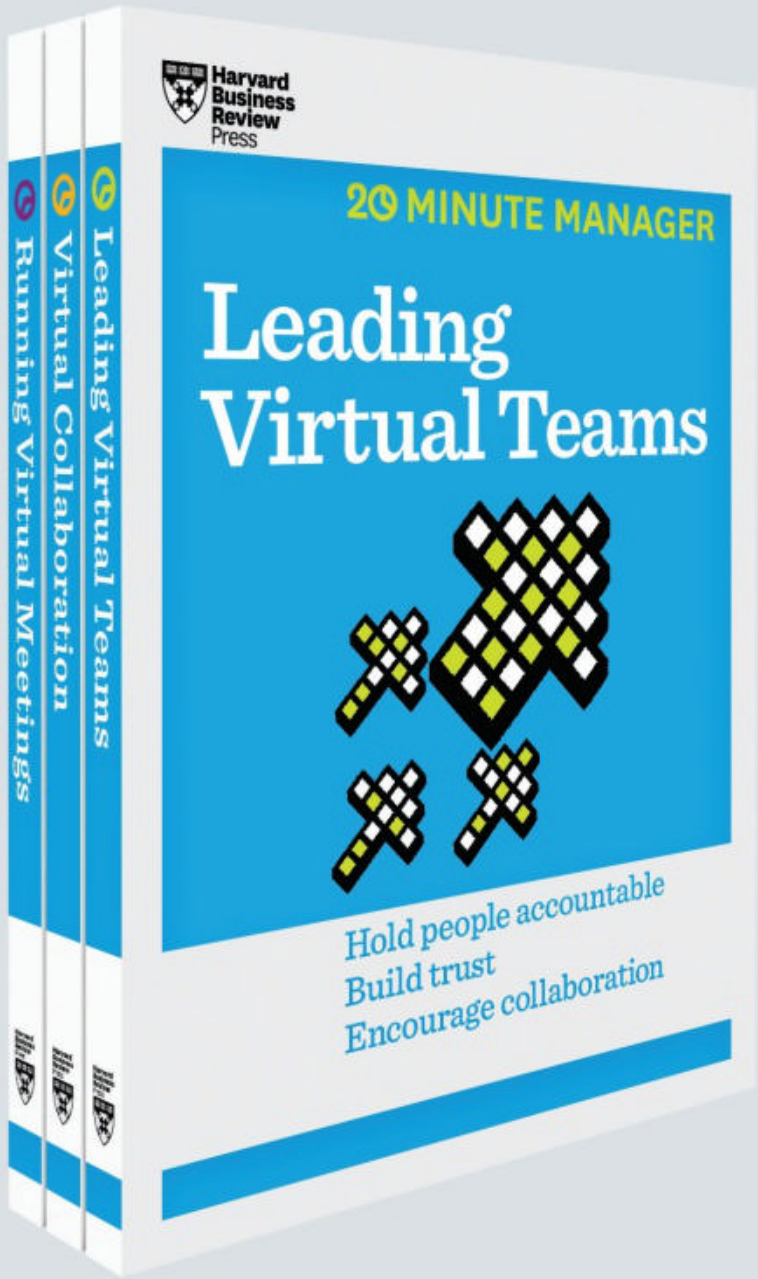
Gravitas Is a Quality You Can Develop | 112
Rebecca Newton

Impostor Syndrome Has Its Advantages | 114
Eben Harrell

Executive Summaries | 118

KOIVO

Harvard Business Review



Be Productive, No Matter Where You Are

Effectively collaborate and manage remotely while completing your own work more efficiently.

Get practical guidance as you work with colleagues in different locations, set shared expectations for your interactions, communicate successfully through a variety of media, and run productive virtual meetings. This collection includes:

- Three ebooks on virtual collaboration, running virtual meetings, and leading virtual teams
- A manual offering step-by-step guidance
- Customizable worksheets and templates
- Checklists, sample scripts, and other tips to improve virtual collaboration
- Five bonus HBR articles that dive deeper into best practices
- An HBR video about building trust on a virtual team

DOC PDF

INCLUDES CUSTOMIZABLE TOOLS AND TEMPLATES IN MULTIPLE FORMATS

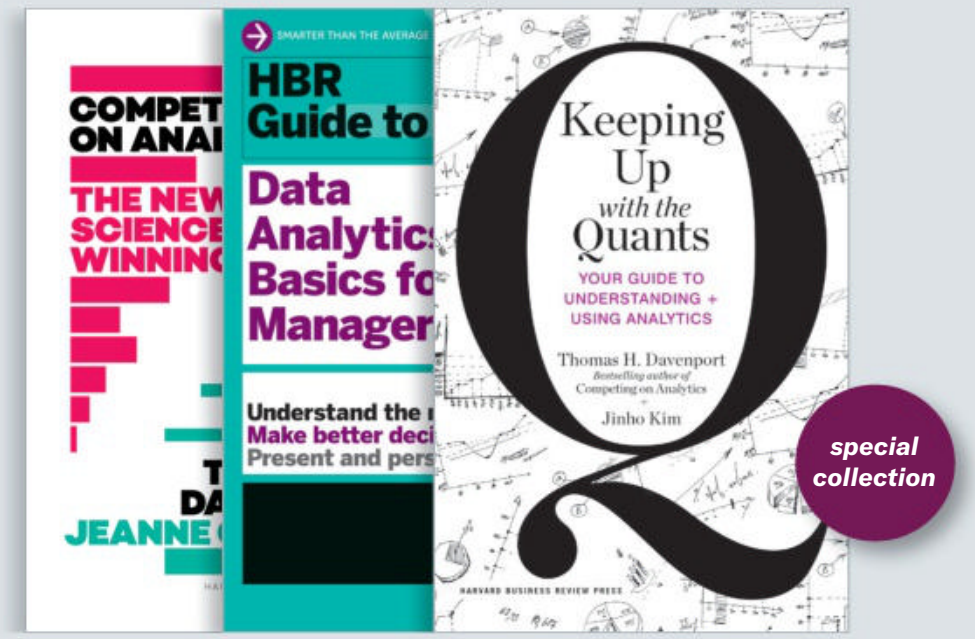
THE VIRTUAL MANAGER COLLECTION EBOOK + TOOLS

PRODUCT #10122E

store.hbr.org

1-800-988-0886 OR +1-617-783-7500

Harvard Business Review



Transform Your Business with Data-Driven Insights

Most companies have massive amounts of data at their disposal yet fail to utilize it in any meaningful way.

HBR's **Data Analytics Collection** will enable you to leverage your data in key business decisions and processes with impressive results. This specially priced three-volume set includes *Keeping Up with the Quants: Your Guide to Understanding and Using Analytics*, *Competing on Analytics: The New Science of Winning*, and *HBR Guide to Data Analytics Basics for Managers Ebook + Tools*.

Data Analytics Collection

PRODUCT #1064BN · 3 ITEMS · DIGITAL FORMAT

A savings of more than 20% off the individual components!

THIS DIGITAL SPECIAL COLLECTION INCLUDES 3 EBOOKS + TOOLS

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY AT:

store.hbr.org

1-800-988-0886 OR +1-617-783-7500

Harvard Business Review

EDITOR IN CHIEF Adi Ignatius

EDITOR, HBR Amy Bernstein

EDITOR, HBR.ORG Maureen Hoch

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, HBR PRESS Melinda Merino

CREATIVE DIRECTOR John Korpics

EXECUTIVE EDITORS Alison Beard, Daniel McGinn, Sarah Moughty, Ania G. Wieckowski

EDITORIAL

SENIOR EDITORS Scott Berinato, Courtney Cashman, David Champion *Paris,* Paige Cohen, Kevin Evers, Holly Bauer Forsyth, Gretchen Gavett, Eben Harrell, Jeff Kehoe, Scott LaPierre, Dave Lievens, Toby Lester, Juan Martinez, Amy Meeker, Curt Nickisch, Steven Prokesch, Vasundhara Sawhney, Thomas Stackpole, Erica Truxler

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR & MANAGING EDITOR, HBR PRESS Allison Peter

SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR Susan Francis

ASSOCIATE EDITORS Dagny Dukach, Stefanie Fernández, Ramsey Khabbaz, Rakshitha Ravishankar, Emma Waldman

ARTICLES EDITORS Christina Bortz, Susan Donovan, Martha Lee Spaulding

DIRECTOR, EDITORIAL AUDIENCE Nicole D. Smith

SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR, AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT Kelsey Gripenstraw

SENIOR AUDIO PRODUCERS Amanda Kersey, Anne Noyes Saini

EDITORIAL COORDINATORS Shanze Hasan, Cheyenne Paterson

STAFF ASSISTANT Christine C. Jack

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Sarah Cliffe, Karen Dillon, Walter Frick, Amy Gallo, Jane Heifetz, Paul Hemp, John Landry, Gardiner Morse, Andrew O'Connell, Anand P. Raman, Dana Rousmaniere

CONTRIBUTING STAFF Eileen Ahuja, Leslie Cauldwell, Jenny Cromie, Kathryn K. Dahl, Sarabeth Fields, Kelly Messier, Annie Noonan, JM Olejarz, Debbie White

DESIGN

DESIGN DIRECTORS Stephani Finks *HBR Press,* Susannah Haesche *HBR,* Marta Kusztra *Product & UX*

ASSOCIATE DESIGN DIRECTOR Karen Player *Multimedia*

SENIOR GRAPHICS EDITOR Macaulay Campbell

SENIOR DESIGNER Carey Bass

SENIOR PHOTO EDITOR Sasha Patkin

DESIGNERS Alex Belser *Multimedia;* So Young Park *Product*

CONTRIBUTING DESIGNER Yuliya Bas

PRODUCTION

DIRECTOR, EDITORIAL PRODUCTION Dana Lissy

MANAGER, EDITORIAL PRODUCTION Christine Wilder

SENIOR PRODUCTION EDITORS Kristin Murphy Romano, Jennifer Waring

PRODUCTION EDITORS Victoria Desmond, Jodi Fisher, Anne Starr

SENIOR PRODUCTION SPECIALIST Robert Eckhardt

PRODUCTION SPECIALIST Alexie Rodriguez

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Bharat Anand, Azeem Azhar, John Battelle, Marcus Buckingham, Nicco Mele, Vivek Shah

EDITORIAL OFFICES
60 Harvard Way, Boston, MA 02163
617-783-7410 | fax 617-783-7493
HBR.org

SUMMER 2023
HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW SPECIAL ISSUE
ISSN 2689-5447
Printed in the U.S.A.

Copyright 2023 Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation. All rights reserved.

GROUP PUBLISHER Sarah McConville

VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL ADVERTISING SALES
Gail Day

MANAGING DIRECTOR, DIGITAL PRODUCT STRATEGY
Jim Bodor

VICE PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ADVERTISING & MARKETING
Craig Catalano

SENIOR DIRECTOR, TECHNOLOGY
Kevin Newman

ADVERTISING
MANAGING DIRECTOR, ANALYTIC SERVICES Alex Clemente
DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL ADVERTISING & PARTNERSHIPS Daniel Cohen
DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, ANALYTIC SERVICES Beth Tracton-Bishop
SENIOR EDITOR, RESEARCH & SPECIAL PROJECTS Todd Pruzan
MANAGING EDITOR, ANALYTIC SERVICES Anthony Baldo
SENIOR EDITOR, ANALYTIC SERVICES Ronald Fink
DIRECTOR, MARKETING Yasir Salem
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, MARKETING Samantha Barry
SENIOR MANAGER, MARKETING Samantha Holloway
MANAGERS, MARKETING Mary Callaghan, Alexandra Shore
COORDINATOR, MARKETING Caitlin Amorin
CONTRIBUTING CONSULTANT MaryAlice Holmes

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
DIRECTOR, CONSUMER MARKETING Nini Diana
DIRECTOR, COMMUNICATIONS Amy Poftak
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, E-COMMERCE Carol Concannon
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, MARKETING FOR CUSTOMER JOURNEYS Caty Jackson
SENIOR MANAGER, REVENUE & RETENTION Corrine Callahan
SENIOR MANAGER, LEAD GENERATION & CONVERSION Josh Getman
SPECIALIST, DIGITAL MARKETING Stephanie Kazemi

PRODUCT MANAGEMENT
DIRECTOR, PRODUCT MANAGEMENT Anne Bartholomew
SENIOR TECHNICAL PRODUCT MANAGER Frederic Lalande
SENIOR PRODUCT MANAGER Jon Goldberg
SENIOR PRODUCT MANAGER, LEARNING Molly Farrar
SENIOR PRODUCT MARKETING MANAGER, LEARNING Marqui Mapp-Taylor
PRODUCT MANAGER Dhanan Lathia
PRODUCT MANAGER, AUDIO Ian Fox

BUSINESS & CUSTOMER ANALYTICS
SENIOR DIRECTOR, BUSINESS ANALYTICS & INSIGHTS Jessica Avery
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, EMAIL AUTOMATION & OPERATIONS Jerry Knott
SENIOR ANALYST, CUSTOMER & MARKETING Ellen Bonaccorsi
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, EXPERIMENTATION & ANALYTICS Abigail Dawson
MANAGER, EMAIL PRODUCTION Frances Lee
MANAGER, EMAIL MARKETING Cara Vaccaro
SENIOR MANAGER, EXPERIMENTATION & ANALYTICS Chris Chaky
SPECIALIST, EMAIL MARKETING Milo Goodman
ANALYST, MARKETING David Gikoshvili

FINANCE & OPERATIONS
SENIOR DIRECTOR, FINANCE & OPERATIONS Greg St. Pierre
SENIOR DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY Kate Griffin
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS & CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Greg Daly
MANAGER, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Danielle Weber
MANAGER, FINANCIAL PLANNING & ANALYSIS Krishna Dudhwewala
SPECIALIST, DATA INTEGRITY & OPERATIONS Edward D. Domina IV
FINANCIAL ANALYST Olivia Johnston
EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR Diana Flynn

HBR PRESS
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER Erika Heilman
DIRECTOR, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS Julie Devoll
DIRECTOR, LICENSING & INTERNATIONAL SALES Jon Shipley
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS Sally Ashworth
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PUBLICITY Felicia Sinusas
SENIOR MANAGER, MANUFACTURING Rick Emanuel
SENIOR MANAGER, SALES OPERATIONS Brian Galvin
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, DIRECT SALES Lindsey Dietrich
MANAGER, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS Alexandra Kephart

TECHNOLOGY
LEAD APPLICATION DEVELOPER Matt Wagner
SENIOR WEB DEVELOPER Kenneth Pereira
SENIOR RELEASE ENGINEER Matthew Han
SENIOR APPLICATION DEVELOPER Rollin Crittendon
FRONT-END ENGINEER Caitlin Smith

A NOTE TO READERS
The views expressed in articles are the authors' and not necessarily those of *Harvard Business Review*, Harvard Business School, or Harvard University. Authors may have consulting or other business relationships with the companies they discuss.

LIBRARY ACCESS
Libraries offer online access to current and back issues of *Harvard Business Review* through EBSCO host databases.

ARTICLE REPRINTS
To purchase reprints of *Harvard Business Review* articles, go to HBR.org.

WORLDWIDE ADVERTISING OFFICES

NEW YORK
3 Columbus Circle, Suite 2210
New York, NY 10019
212-872-9280 | fax 212-956-0933
Maria A. Beacom *Sales Director, Technology & North American Research*
Michael Valecce *New England & NY Luxury Account Manager*

CHICAGO
312-206-6045
James A. Mack
Central/Southwest U.S. Sales Director

MIDWEST & SOUTHEAST
312-867-3862 | cell 312-401-2277
Samuel K. White
Midwest & Southeast Sales Director

LONDON
44-0-7890-608-707
Alexander Bart
Director, European Sales & Research
44-0-7538-236-722
Jack Elia *Sales Account Manager*

CALIFORNIA 415-986-7762
BEIJING 86-10-6551-0663
FRANCE 33-01-4643-0066
HONG KONG 852-237-52311
INDIA 212-872-9291
JAPAN 81-03-3541-4166
KOREA 82-2-730-8004
SOUTH AMERICA 55-11-98160-0177
UAE 971-4-228-7708
UNITED KINGDOM 44-20-7291-9129

For all other inquiries, please call 212-872-9280 or visit HBR.org/hbr-advertising-sales.

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

UNITED STATES & CANADA
800-274-3214
Harvard Business Review
P.O. Box 37457; Boone, IA 50037-0457
HBR.org/subscriberservices

ALL OTHER COUNTRIES
Asia Pacific region: 61-2-9158-6127
All other regions: 44-1858-438412
Harvard Business Review
Tower House, Lathkill Street
Market Harborough LE16 9EF
United Kingdom
www.subscription.co.uk/hbr/help

RATES PER YEAR
United States $119 | Canada US$139
International US$165 | Mexico US$139

SUBMISSIONS
We encourage prospective authors to follow HBR's "Guidelines for Authors" before submitting manuscripts.

To obtain a copy, please visit HBR.org; write to: The Editor, *Harvard Business Review*, 60 Harvard Way, Boston, MA 02163; or email hbr_editorial@HBR.org.

Unsolicited manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Rotman MANAGEMENT

"Read cover to cover. Superb."

Tom Peters
Author, *In Search of Excellence*; Thinkers50 Hall of Fame

+ **Free Gift**

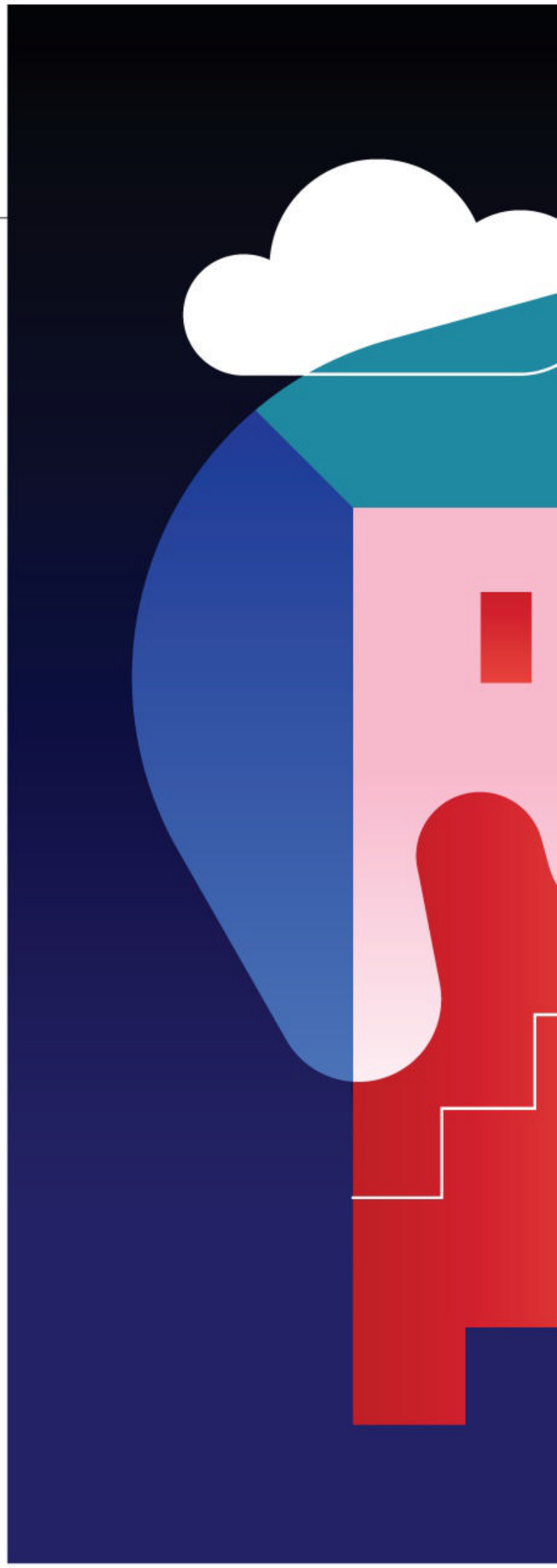
Filled with thought-provoking ideas and insights from leading global academics and management practitioners. Published by Canada's leading business school.

Subscribe today and receive our mini issue on creativity FREE!

Just $49.95 CAD/year
Available in print or digital

www.rotman.utoronto.ca/hbr

Rotman School of Management
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 2005

The Dangers of Feeling Like a Fake

Many skilled, accomplished executives fear that they're not good enough—impostors who are bound to be found out. By undervaluing their talent, are they ruining their careers and companies?

→ by MANFRED F. R. KETS DE VRIES

A FEW YEARS AGO, a middle manager in a telecommunications company came to see me upon his promotion to a senior management role. I'll call him Tobin Holmes (all case study names in this article have been disguised). A young Englishman who had studied classics at Oxford before graduating in the top 5% of his class at Insead, Holmes was very clever. But he feared he couldn't take on the new job's responsibilities. At the root of Holmes's dilemma was his suspicion that he was just not good enough, and he lived in dread that he would be exposed at any moment.

Yet, at the same time, he seemed bent on betraying the very inadequacy he was so anxious to conceal. In his personal life, for example, he indulged in conspicuously self-destructive behavior, such as public affairs with numerous women and a drinking spree that resulted in a disastrous car accident. At work, he found it increasingly difficult to concentrate and make decisions. He worried—and now for good reason—

Illustration by **KOIVO**

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

that his problems at the office would be noticed by the CEO and other members of the board. When would they realize that they had made a horrible mistake in promoting him to the senior executive team?

When the fear and stress overwhelmed him, Holmes quit his job and accepted a junior position at a larger organization. Given his genuine talent, however, it didn't take long before he was asked to head up one of that company's major country units, a role widely known to be a stepping-stone to the top. In this new role, Holmes's feelings of doubt resurfaced. Rather than risk being exposed as incompetent, he left the job within a year and moved on to yet another company. There, despite his performance, top management looked at his employment record and concluded that Holmes just didn't have the right stuff to make it to the highest levels of leadership.

Holmes couldn't let himself move up to the most senior levels in an organization because, deep inside, he feared that he was an impostor who would eventually be discovered. In many walks of life—and business is no exception—there are high achievers who believe that they are complete fakes. To the outside observer, these individuals appear to be remarkably accomplished; often they are extremely successful leaders. Despite their staggering achievements, however, these people subjectively sense that they are frauds. This *neurotic imposture*, as psychologists call it, is not a false humility. It is the flip side of giftedness and causes many talented, hardworking, and capable leaders—men and women who have achieved great things—to believe that they don't deserve their success.

To some extent, of course, we are *all* impostors. We play roles on the stage of life, presenting a public self that differs from the private self we share with intimates and morphing both selves as circumstances demand. Displaying a facade is part and parcel of the human condition. Indeed, one reason the feeling of being an impostor is so widespread is that society places enormous pressure on people to stifle their real selves.

But neurotic impostors feel more fraudulent and alone than other people do. Because they view themselves as charlatans, their success is worse than meaningless: It is a burden. In their heart of hearts, these self-doubters believe that others are much smarter and more capable than they are, so any praise impostors earn makes no sense to them. "Bluffing" their way through life (as they see it), they are haunted by the constant fear of exposure. With every success, they think, "I was lucky this time, fooling everyone, but will my luck hold? When will people discover that I'm not up to the job?"

Neurotic impostors can be found at all levels of an organization. Typically, the misgivings begin with the first job, right after graduation, when people are fraught with anxiety and particularly insecure about their ability to prove themselves. Promotion from middle management to senior management is another tricky time because an executive must negotiate the difficult switch from being a specialist to becoming a general manager. But neurotic impostors face their greatest challenges when they are promoted from senior management to CEO. In my work with senior managers and CEOs, I've found that many neurotic impostors function well as long as they aren't in the number one position. Often, a leader's feelings of self-doubt and anxiety are less pressing when he is lower on the totem pole, because senior executives usually provide support and mentoring. But once a leader becomes the CEO, everything he does is highly visible. He is expected to stand on his own.

For this reason, people like Tobin Holmes abound in business. In my career as a management professor, consultant, leadership coach, and psychoanalyst, I have explored the topic of neurotic imposture with individuals and with large groups of senior executives. My experience has shown that feelings of neurotic imposture proliferate in today's organizations, and I encounter this type of dysfunctional perception and behavior all the time—particularly when working with executives in consulting firms and in investment banking. In the following pages, I will describe the phenomenon of neurotic imposture; explore how perfectionist overachievers can damage their careers by allowing their anxiety to trigger self-handicapping behavior; and discuss how such an executive's dysfunctional behavior can have a ripple effect throughout a company, hurting not just the morale of colleagues but also the bottom line.

Why You Might Feel Like a Fake

The term *impostor phenomenon* was coined in 1978 by Georgia State

With every success, neurotic impostors think, "I was lucky this time, fooling everyone, but will my luck hold? When will people discover that I'm not up to the job?"

University psychology professor Pauline Clance and psychologist Suzanne Imes in a study of high-achieving women. These psychologists discovered that many of their female clients seemed unable to internalize and accept their achievements. Instead, in spite of consistent objective data to the contrary, they attributed their successes to serendipity, luck, contacts, timing, perseverance, charm, or even the ability to appear more capable than they felt themselves to be. (See the sidebar "Women and the Impostor Phenomenon.")

Numerous doctoral theses and research papers have followed that original study. Although their findings have not always been consistent, most studies suggest that neurotic imposture is by no means limited to women. Men can also exhibit it—though, interestingly, genuine imposture (that is, deliberate fraud) is more common in men than in women (see the sidebar "Genuine Fakes"). Further, the incidence of neurotic imposture seems to vary by profession. For example, it is highly prevalent in academia and medicine, both disciplines in which the appearance of intelligence is vital to success.

Not surprisingly, my clinical interviews with CEOs and other high-level executives suggest that specific family structures can be breeding grounds for feelings of imposture. Certain dysfunctional families—particularly those in which parents are overinvested in achievement and where human warmth is lacking—tend to produce children who are prone to neurotic imposture. Individuals who have been raised in this kind of environment seem to believe that their parents will notice them only when they excel. As time goes on, these people often turn into insecure overachievers.

Paradoxically, a predisposition to neurotic imposture is also quite common in individuals who are *not* expected to succeed. In socially disadvantaged groups (often with a blue-collar background, for example), parents may withhold encouragement because their children's ambitions are inconsistent with family expectations. Children who manage to advance to positions of real power as adults, however, often transcend their families of origin in such a spectacular way that a lingering insecurity remains about having become so "grandiose" in their success. Frequently, because of conflicting signals, these executives wonder just how long that success will last. This fear of surpassing one's parents can cause feelings of neurotic imposture to persist long after the parents have died.

Birth order also influences the development of neurotic imposture. Feelings of imposture are more common among firstborn children, reflecting the new parents' nervous inexperience and greater expectations of these children. For example, older children are often expected to help out in the care of brothers and sisters and are held up to younger siblings as models of maturity.

How Your Fear Becomes Reality

How does neurotic imposture get out of hand? The trigger is often perfectionism. In its mild form, of course, perfectionism provides the energy

Idea in Brief

To some extent, we are all impostors, presenting ourselves in public differently from the way we do in private. But so-termed neurotic impostors widen that gap, regarding themselves as frauds despite their outward success. This posture is not only personally damaging; it derails success at work.

Neurotic imposture affects both men and women and is often triggered by perfectionism. The impostor convinces themselves that they are not good enough, propelling them into a cycle in which they fear being found out, set up impossible goals, try to improve, lose any sense of work/life balance, and question their own judgment. In doing so they often sabotage their own success—thereby contributing to their feeling like a fake.

Leaders should keep an eye out for the signs of this cycle in themselves and in their subordinates. Once it's identified, self-evaluation can help manage impostor feelings by helping the subject identify the source of these feelings. For help in doing this, reach out to a leadership coach, psychotherapist, mentor, or friend.

Women and the Impostor Phenomenon

Women who reach successful positions that conflict with their family of origin's way of thinking about gender roles are especially prone to feeling fraudulent. The gender socialization that women are often exposed to—for instance, being told that they should become nurses or secretaries when choosing a career—tends to augment their sense of imposture when their achievements rise above those expectations. Ironically, this feeling might, at an unconscious level, carry benefits: A woman might be able to deal with ambivalence about her real career achievements by keeping them out of conscious awareness.

Inner confusion develops into genuine neurotic imposture for many women when they reach critical junctures in their lives concerning marriage, work, and children. These decisions are especially difficult for women who have had traditional mothers. Consciously or not, women tend to compare their chosen roles with the roles their mothers played. The fact that working women choose not to stay at home but rather to pursue a career—a lifestyle so different from what they witnessed as children—often makes them feel like bad mothers to their own children and bad wives to their husbands.

Gender role socialization isn't the only thing that makes women more vulnerable than men to neurotic imposture. The fact that businesswomen have to function in an environment dominated by men compounds their insecurity, because when women are successful, they're not the only ones who suspect imposture. Many of their competitive male colleagues likewise assume that chance or an affirmative action program—not talent or skill—was responsible for the success. Though few men will express such an opinion publicly, subtle insinuations from male colleagues add to a woman's fear that the "luck" won't last. As a result, many very gifted women don't know that they have superior talents. Moreover, if they *do* realize it, they are more likely than men to hide those talents and to play dumb as a strategy for dealing with others' envy and their own recurring feelings of self-doubt.

that leads to great accomplishments. "Benign" perfectionists, who do not suffer feelings of inadequacy, derive pleasure from their achievements and don't obsess over failures. Neurotic impostors, however, are seldom benign in their perfectionism. They are "absolute" perfectionists, who set excessively high, unrealistic goals and then experience self-defeating thoughts and behaviors when they can't reach those goals. They are driven by the belief that they are currently not good enough, but that they could do better if only they worked harder. For this reason, perfectionism often turns neurotic impostors into workaholics. Fearing discovery of their "fraudulence," they burden themselves with too much work to compensate for their lack of self-esteem and identity. Work/life balance is a meaningless concept to them.

I'm reminded of a cartoon that depicts a CEO handing over a dossier to one of his subordinates. He says, "Take your time. I'm not in a hurry. Take the whole weekend if necessary." Neurotic impostors commonly enter into abusive, self-defeating collusions of this sort. They don't realize that they may be pushing themselves and others too hard, often to the detriment of long-term success. By exploiting themselves so brutally in this way, they risk rapid and early burnout.

The vicious cycle begins when the impostor sets impossible goals. She fails to reach these goals, of course (because *no one* could reach them), then tortures herself endlessly about the failure, which incites further self-flagellation, accentuates the feelings of imposture, and inspires her to designate yet another unattainable set of goals—and the entire cycle of workaholism and fraudulence begins again. That's what happened to Robert Pierce, an extraordinarily gifted trader at a highly prestigious investment bank, who set ever increasing goals of financial compensation for himself to deal with his anxieties about being a fake. Initially, Pierce felt elated whenever he reached his goal; but he became more desperate every time he learned that someone else earned more than he did. This kicked off an orgy of self-blame that did little to improve his career or his organizational effectiveness.

When Fakes Court Failure

Because they are so ambivalent about their achievements, neurotic impostors often appear to be engagingly humble. Self-deprecation, of course, is a perfectly respectable character trait and,

The neurotic impostor's humility actually stems from another kind of protective impulse: the need for an exit strategy.

from a career management point of view, can be seen as a protective strategy. Underplaying one's achievements defuses other people's envy and directs attention away from success, thereby lowering others' expectations—a useful maneuver in case of future failure. A display of self-deprecation also seems to convey a sense of modesty, which can elicit encouragement and support from others.

But the neurotic impostor's humility actually stems from another kind of protective impulse: the need for an exit strategy. Failure (at least at a subliminal level) becomes a desirable way out. Think of the journalist who wins a Pulitzer prize at a relatively young age. Such a "gift" can turn out to be a poisonous boon. When such good fortune occurs, what can one do for an encore? Great achievements have ruined many a neurotic impostor because they can lead to paralysis. Indeed, to neurotic impostors, granting wishes for success can be one of fate's cruelest jokes.

For many neurotic impostors, the heart of the problem is the fear that success and fame will hurt them in some way—that family, friends, and others will continue to like them much better if they remain "small." After all, people who covet success are likely to envy those who have achieved it. As Ambrose Bierce wrote in *The Devil's Dictionary,* success is "the one unpardonable sin against one's fellows."

In extreme cases, neurotic impostors bring about the very failure that they fear. This self-destructive behavior can take many forms, including procrastination, abrasiveness, and the inability to delegate. As Tobin Holmes's experience illustrates, it can also take such extreme forms as inappropriate womanizing or substance abuse on the job.

Neurotic impostors are also quite creative at destroying their own successful careers. It's as if they *want* to be discovered. Perhaps assisting in their own unmasking is a proactive way of coping with their anxiety; maybe it offers a sense of relief.

Mike Larson, a senior executive I worked with a few years ago, exemplifies this propensity. After a brilliant career as a medical researcher, Larson was offered the position of director of research in a global company specializing in over-the-counter drugs. When he embarked on this challenging new research agenda, however, Larson's incessant fear of exposure harmed rather than enhanced his performance. It was one thing to be a member of a team, but taking on the number one research position was another question altogether. To be so visible made him feel increasingly anxious, contributing to his drive to do even better; but his inability to delegate and his tendency toward micromanagement led to a greater sense of malaise.

Larson realized that he was digging a hole for himself, but it was difficult for him to ask for help. He was afraid that doing so would give his colleagues proof of what they surely suspected—that he was an impostor, a fraud. To avoid being found out, he withdrew into himself, agonized over what his colleagues thought about him, worried about not living up to their expectations, and waffled over every decision. The result was anxiety-filled days, sleepless nights, and an intense fear of making mistakes—a fear that made him unwilling to experiment, develop, and learn.

Like most neurotic impostors, Larson engaged in faulty reality testing. This distortion in his cognition caused him to dramatize all setbacks—he blew small incidents out of proportion and cast himself as the helpless victim. Larson lived with the misconception that he was the only one prone to failure and self-doubt, and this made him feel even more insecure and isolated. Like other neurotic impostors, he focused on the negative and failed to give himself credit for his accomplishments. He also harmed his career by becoming a master of catastrophizing—reaching exaggerated conclusions based on limited evidence.

Only when Larson was awarded the top research position did he realize how much he missed the mentors he'd had at earlier stages of his career. Those mentors had helped him to deal with the pressures of his job and to maintain equilibrium under stress. But when he was promoted, he found it much harder to ask for advice and to find people who would challenge his faulty cognition. As a result, he executed a number of poor management decisions that contributed to his organization's ineffectiveness. Eventually, he was asked to step down from the director's position.

The Neurotic Organization

Neurotic impostors can, and do, damage the organizations they try so hard to please. Their work ethic can be contagious, but because they are so eager to succeed, they often become impatient and abrasive. Neurotic impostors are

Neurotic impostors are quite creative at destroying their own successful careers. It's as if they want to be discovered.

extremely tough on themselves and thus not predisposed to spare others. They drive their employees too hard and create a gulag-like atmosphere in their organizations, which inevitably translates into high employee turnover rates, absenteeism, and other complications that can affect the bottom line. Moreover, neurotic impostors can intimidate others with their intensity. And because they don't have what it takes to be effective leadership coaches, they are not generally talented in leadership development and succession planning.

More dangerous, however, is neurotic imposture's effect on the quality of decision making. Executives who feel like impostors are afraid to trust their own judgment. Their fearful, overly cautious kind of leadership can easily spread across the company and bring about dire consequences for the organization. For instance, a neurotic impostor CEO is very likely to suppress his company's entrepreneurial capabilities. After all, if he doesn't trust his own instincts, why should he trust anyone else's?

Neurotic impostor CEOs are also highly likely to become addicted to consulting companies because reassurances provided by "impartial" outsiders compensate for the executives' feelings of insecurity. Of course, judicious use of consulting advice does have its place; but neurotic impostor executives all too easily turn into puppets whose strings are completely manipulated by those same advisers. Ralph Gordon, the CEO of a global engineering firm, suffered just such an experience. In a group session during one of my seminars, he explained that he really didn't choose engineering—his father had chosen it for him. Gordon conceded to his father's wishes and entered the business world, where he never felt comfortable in his corporate role. When he reached more senior positions, Gordon began to rely on consultants, some of whom took advantage of his insecurity at a very high price. Not only did they charge Gordon's firm substantial fees for their services, but their predatory behavior increased Gordon's feelings of dependency.

This type of behavior is exacerbated when neurotic impostors work in an organization that punishes failure. If the company culture does not tolerate mistakes, the leader's level of anxiety will increase, making neurotic behavior all the more likely. This is paralyzing for the perfectionist whose fear of failure will have an even more negative impact on the organization.

Consider Lynn Orwell, who had a successful career at a consulting firm before accepting an offer from a prominent media company. In her consulting job, Orwell had functioned exceptionally well. But this changed when she accepted an assignment to run the new firm's European operation.

Although Orwell was an outstanding source of good ideas, her fear of failure led her to manage in ways that seemed countercultural. In an organization that had always been decentralized, for example, she decided to centralize many of the functions in her part of the business. But what really grated on many people was that Orwell wanted to make most of the decisions herself. Her perfectionist attitude and her need for immediate results made delegation anathema to her and dampened the team's productivity and creativity. Orwell's coworkers started to worry about the abrasiveness that had crept into her manner, and her prickliness about criticism—whether real or perceived—began to irritate a growing number of her colleagues. She reacted with defensiveness and hostility to comments about any of her proposals, reports, or decisions. Furthermore, anxious not to be found wanting, she took ages to prepare for meetings, trying to anticipate every conceivable question that could be asked. Such precautions extended her already lengthy workweek into weekends, and she expected others to show the same commitment.

Orwell's sense of neurotic imposture deeply affected the organization. As time went on, many of Orwell's team members began to ask for transfers to other parts of the organization. Others quietly sought out headhunters. Those who stayed took a passive-aggressive attitude toward Orwell. Since they felt it was not worth the effort to reason with her, they let her make all the decisions but undermined them in subtle ways. As a result, her European division—once hailed as the flagship operation—was increasingly seen as a liability. By the year's end, profitability for Orwell's division had fallen into a deep slump, confirming the company's belief that she was truly incompetent. Ultimately, the division was sold to a competitor. Orwell's neurosis had ruined not only her career but a perfectly robust business as well.

The Light at the End of the Tunnel

Neurotic imposture is not an inevitable part of the human condition, and

it is avoidable. Early prevention, for instance, can completely ward it off. If caregivers identify and deal with factors that lead to this phenomenon very early in life, the dysfunctional effects will never surface. Parental awareness of the downside of setting excessively high standards for children goes a long way toward preventing later misery. But there is hope for late-diagnosed impostors as well. Experience has shown that psychotherapeutic interventions can be very effective in changing distorted self-perceptions.

Yet the best—and often most appropriate—way for you to manage feelings of imposture can be to evaluate yourself. After all, you are the best person to assess the source of these problems. And though a leadership coach or psychotherapist can certainly help you on this journey of self-discovery and change, a mentor or good friend can also put things in perspective. Realizing that you may repeat with your children the same pattern of behavior you learned from your parents, for instance, can be a great motivator.

If you are unable to take the initiative to deal with your feelings of imposture, however, your boss needs to intervene. Such was the case with John Stodard, the CEO of a large telecommunications company, who came to talk to me upon the recommendation of his chairman. In our sessions, Stodard wondered if he needed pointers on how to be a more effective executive. A 360-degree feedback exercise showed that he was inclined toward micromanagement and perfectionism and that he possessed poor listening skills. Some of the written comments also noted that his

Genuine Fakes

In contrast to neurotic impostors, true impostors are con artists—and they tend to be men. Consider Ferdinand Waldo Demara, for example. In the fall of 1951, this real impostor's career came to an abrupt halt after a woman became alarmed by an article she saw in her daily newspaper. The article described a successful emergency operation performed by Joseph Cyr, a surgeon, on the deck of a Royal Canadian Navy destroyer during the Korean War. Worried, the woman contacted her son, also a physician named Joseph Cyr, who assured her that he was safe and sound and practicing medicine in New Brunswick. Unsettled by the odd coincidence of names, however, Dr. Cyr then contacted the police, an initiative that led to the unraveling of Demara's bizarre career.

It didn't take long for the authorities to find out that Demara was masquerading as Dr. Cyr. In fact, the bogus doctor's medical "training" had been limited to a few weeks working as an unskilled hospital orderly in the United States. That experience, however, along with the help of the ship's medical attendant and the navy's generous supply of anesthetics and antibiotics, was enough for him to successfully play the role of medical doctor. Fortunately, despite Demara's lack of qualifications, his patients survived their treatments.

Further investigation revealed that Demara had gone through most of his life masquerading as other people. His career as an impostor spanned three decades and included a wide variety of pseudo-identities, such as deputy sheriff, prison warden, psychologist, university lecturer, Trappist monk, and cancer researcher. This chameleon-like career didn't come without a price, however. At one point, Demara's impersonation resulted in a term of imprisonment.

Apparently, his inability to figure out what to do with his life motivated him to masquerade as other people, with the professed hope of eventually "finding" himself. Personal gain wasn't a major part of the equation. Interestingly enough, his talent at playing different roles was remarkable, and many of his unsuspecting employers were quite satisfied with his work. He was a master of improvisation, gathering from textbooks and observation the necessary knowledge to fill each role he took on.

Demara's exploits fascinated the public. After his discharge from the Canadian navy, he sold his story to *Life* magazine and became the subject of a book by Robert Crichton, which led to the making of the film *The Great Impostor,* starring Tony Curtis. Crichton reported that he'd had a hard time pinning down the impostor's motives for engaging in all his masquerades. At one point, Demara is said to have told him, "I'm a rotten man," adding that he was prompted by "rascality, sheer rascality." But Demara also suggested that his activities served a good cause. According to him, his various impostures were instrumental in making organizations more vigilant about confidential records, thereby helping to better secure people's privacy.

impatience put intense pressure on his directors and that morale at the office was quite low. As we discussed the problem together, Stodard began to realize the extent to which he had internalized the expectations of his extremely demanding parents, and he started to change. He began to experiment with new behavior in the office and received a surprisingly positive reception, which increased his sense of self-efficacy. When I met him a year later, Stodard mentioned quite proudly how morale at the office had dramatically improved, how the company had become more profitable, and how his ability to let go of his controlling tendencies had contributed to these successes.

Like Stodard's chairman, good bosses remain alert for symptoms of neurotic imposture in their employees: fear of failure, fear of success, perfectionism, procrastination, and workaholism. In performance reviews, bosses should signal (uncritically) any danger signs to their direct reports. They should also explain how anxiety about performance can take on a self-destructive quality, and they should emphasize the value of work/life balance, pointing out that extreme strength can easily become a weakness.

Above all, bosses need to make sure that a subordinate suffering from neurotic imposture understands that with responsibility comes constructive criticism. This means teaching—by word and by example—that open, honest, critical feedback is an opportunity for new learning and not an irredeemable catastrophe. They must point out that *everyone* in a responsible job occasionally feels unequal to the task and needs time to adjust and learn the ropes. The worst thing a neurotic impostor can do, especially in a new position, is to compare his abilities with those of seasoned executives. This is guaranteed to be an exercise in self-flagellation.

At the same time, leaders must strengthen the perceived link between positive achievements and efforts. They can do this not only by offering praise when it's due, but also by acknowledging that making mistakes (though not repeating them!) is part of a successful corporate culture. The wise organization does not punish "smart" mistakes; indeed, to "fail forward" should be part of an organization's implicit cultural values. Mistakes can offer great opportunities for learning and personal growth, and leaders need to help neurotic impostors understand that a fear of failure is normal and need not be debilitating.

When it's the CEO himself who feels like a neurotic impostor, the situation is more complicated. A leader at the top does not find it easy to ask for support from mentors or from subordinates who feel their boss "has it all." For this reason, many high-performance organizations now have leadership-coaching programs to help their executives cope better with the vicissitudes of working life. When leadership coaches recognize the signs of neurotic imposture, they are in a good position to give constructive advice. In the 15 years that I have been running top-level seminars at Insead, I have listened to executives discuss significant experiences in their work and personal lives. Being willing to talk about these neurotic imposture problems and accept peer support not only has a profound effect on leaders but also has a deep impact on the organization that the neurotic impostor has helped to shape.

IT'S OFTEN SAID that a person's strengths are also his weaknesses. The same is true for an organization. In most well-run organizations, senior managers remove low performers or develop them to become high performers. But these same managers are less effective in managing people who appear to be problem-free. By their very nature, neurotic impostors are very hard to detect because the early stages of an executive's career are so conducive to high performance. It is, in fact, a rare leader who does not suffer from neurotic imposture. All the more reason, therefore, for managers to be on the lookout for it in themselves, their reports, and their potential successors. Failing to recognize and deal with neurotic impostors has serious consequences both for individual sufferers and for the organizations relying on them.

HBR Reprint R0509F

Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries *is the Distinguished Professor of Leadership Development and Organizational Change at INSEAD, France and Singapore. He is also a practicing psychoanalyst. He has pioneered team coaching as an organizational intervention technique. He has authored or edited more than 50 books on the psychology of leaders and organizations, including* The Leader on the Couch *(Wiley, 2006),* The CEO Whisperer *(Palgrave, 2021), and* Leading Wisely *(Wiley, 2022).*

Marketing Material.
All forms of investment involve risk. The value of investments and the income derived from them is not guaranteed and it can fall as well as rise and you may not get back the original amount invested. This material is for distribution to professional investors only and issued by Pictet Asset Management Inc., (Pictet AM Inc) which is registered as an SEC Investment Adviser.

Megatrend investing? Talk to the pioneers.

Sustainability
Technology
Health
assetmanagement.pictet

PICTET
1805
Asset Management

Building Responsible Partnerships

Quick Takes

YAY ABE

1. I'm Not an Impostor—So Why Do I Feel Like One?

→ by LERON L. BARTON

BEFORE EVERY LECTURE I give, I scan the audience from my space on the stage. It's almost always made up of accomplished professionals: directors, engineers, managers, and executives. Most hold bachelor's or master's degrees and have years of experience in their fields. Also, almost all of them are white.

I have a ritual. I take one deep breath and fix my clothes for the umpteenth time. I rehearse my opening line and approach the podium. Looking out at the sea of bodies waiting to hear me talk, I wonder: Am I supposed to be here? Giving a lecture to people who are way more successful than I am? Is this a joke? Or have I just lucked out?

This is a small window into what I, as a Black man in corporate America, regularly experience: impostor syndrome.

The term "impostor syndrome" was coined during a study of high-achieving women in the 1970s. It describes someone who often fosters feelings of doubt and questions whether they deserve their achievements. People who experience it tend to believe that what they've earned was awarded to them by accident, chance, or luck. Between 25% and 30% of high achievers feel impostor syndrome, and nearly 70% of adults have impostor thoughts at least once in their lifetime. It can be debilitating, and according to one report by Touro University, "it is typically caused by cyclical societal norms and expectations."

While impostor syndrome may impact anyone, for Black people, it can be even more damaging. In a country that has subjugated African Americans since we were brought over in chains, our mental health and self-worth have never not been assaulted. In grade school, Black students' work and behavior are harshly scrutinized and repeatedly stamped "not good enough." From a young age, many of us are taught to believe our achievements pale compared with those of our white peers. Our seniors tell us (and the research reiterates): "You have to work twice as hard to get half of what they have." As we graduate to the workforce and fail to see ourselves represented in so many industries, how can we not believe it? How can we not ask ourselves: Do I really belong here?

Despite all this, I've managed to accomplish a lot. I'm a two-time published author, a three-time Tedx speaker, and an artist who has written on politics, mass incarceration, and race at length. I've lectured at schools and universities around the world. Tech companies have hosted

The best way to battle impostor syndrome is to set realistic goals and address impostor feelings as they show up.

my workshops. And yet, I often feel like a fraud.

Impostor syndrome can take a toll on the physical health of Black Americans. Epidemiologist Sherman James coined the term "John Henryism" to describe what happens when we have to work so hard to overcome structural racism under stressful circumstances. The impact it has on our bodies can succumb us to illness, and even possible death. In my experience, the term describes what living with impostor syndrome feels like: fighting to prove to myself that I belong in spaces that many Black people don't occupy, sometimes to my own mental and physical detriment, all because society tells me that I don't belong.

I've had impostor syndrome for as long as I can remember. Initially, I thought it was because I didn't attend a prestigious school or work at a large company, but when I began to accumulate accolades throughout my career as a writer and a speaker, I still felt small. I continued to view my work as "not good enough," and sometimes not suitable at all. Even when *Fortune* 500 companies extended invitations to me to speak, I would think, Why me? Afterward, I would spend hours scrutinizing my performance and myself.

Neha Sampat, founder and CEO of BelongLab, an organization focused on creating a culture of belonging for all employees, believes that for racialized people, impostor syndrome is a type of internalized bias. "It's a form of harm that's been inflicted on those who are marginalized," she says. "When you've grown up with people telling you explicitly or implicitly that you don't belong or questioning your worth, at some point you *can*—not necessarily *will*—have that voice of doubt burrow into your brain. It becomes the voice that says: Who do I think I am?"

A former attorney, Sampat gives workshops and keynotes on the topic. She says the best way to battle impostor syndrome is to set realistic goals and address impostor feelings as they show up. "We're acculturated to try to outrun our feelings of self-doubt, but what we should do is stop, turn around, and face them."

Sampat's words recall some good, timeless advice from writer James Baldwin: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Many African Americans in the corporate world are starting to do the work. The DEI sector is growing. Group discussions among professionals are being held. More organizations are calling attention to mental health resources that offer services specifically designed for Black people.

Jewel Love, CEO of Black Executive Men, is just one example. His organization counsels Black men to help them overcome the challenges they face in corporate America, build confidence, and find inner peace. "While these men may feel comfortable in executing a task, they may be viewed as incapable," he says. "There's a certain racial element of this being attached to their thinking in being viewed as competent or incompetent. This is where having a coach or therapist whom they can speak with regularly and validate their experiences is important."

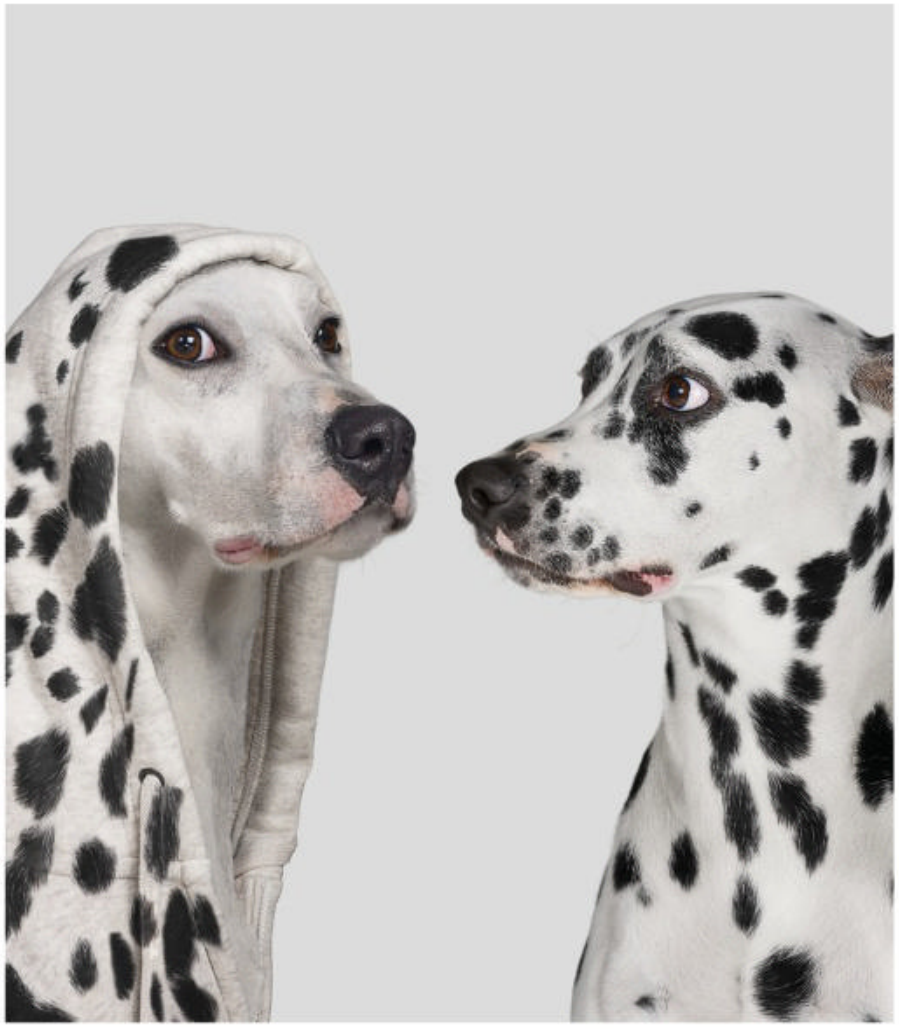
What's in progress now is only the start. We need to keep doing this work to truly level the playing field.

For me, impostor syndrome is a battle that I still fight. Through a life of racism and discrimination, inherited from those who fought for centuries before me, my doubts have been born and will take time to erase. I say with honesty that at times it's crippling. But I also have a desire to be great. I'm owed that opportunity. I'm learning to deal with these feelings in a more constructive way.

When I sense impostor syndrome creeping up, I do as Sampat said: I address it. I remind myself that I've earned my accomplishments because I'm competent and talented—not because I'm lucky. I've ascended through my career due to my intelligence and skill set—not because of chance. When I hear the voice in my head saying I don't belong here, I now say, "You are LeRon Barton," I know what that means because I worked hard to get here. I'm not a fraud.

Originally published on HBR Ascend May 12, 2022

***LeRon L. Barton** is a writer, author, and speaker based in San Diego. He has written essays about race, mass incarceration, politics, tech, and dating. His articles have appeared in* Salon, Black Enterprise, *YourTango, the Good Men Project,* Mel Magazine, *TEDxWilsonPark, and Al Jazeera.*



2. Helping an Employee Overcome Their Self-Doubt

→ by TARA SOPHIA MOHR

YOU WANT TO give a member of your team a stretch assignment, but she tells you she's just "not ready yet"—she'd like to get more experience before taking it on.

You offer to make a valuable introduction for someone you mentor. He seems excited about it at first but doesn't follow up. Later, you discover that he felt intimidated because he believed he'd have nothing to say.

As managers and mentors we frequently encounter these types of situations, when we come up against the limiting voices of self-doubt in the people we support.

The negative impact of that voice is tremendous. If someone on your team is hampered by a harsh inner critic, they're probably talking themselves out of sharing their ideas and insights. Held back by self-doubt, some of your most talented people will shy away from leading projects or teams, or put off going for the big opportunities—new clients, new business lines, innovative moves—that could help your business grow.

As a manager or mentor, one of the most powerful ways you can unlock your people's potential is to give them a toolkit for managing self-doubt.

The Manager's Common Mistake

Typically managers and mentors make a common mistake. They think their job is to encourage, compliment, or cheerlead when their people are struggling with self-doubt. They say, "You really can do this!" or "I have complete confidence in you. I wouldn't have given you this role if I didn't think you had the capability to do it."

In the coaching field, this is known as "arguing with the inner critic." It's the dialogue between someone's voice of self-doubt ("I can't do that because I don't have what it takes") and the affirming words of a supportive person who has a different perspective ("Yes, you can! You are great!").

Coaches in training are taught to never argue with a client's inner critic. Such arguments are usually a waste of everyone's time, for two reasons.

First, such reassurance rarely is convincing. The inner critic's view is not based on data but in instinctual, overreactive fears of vulnerability and failure. Hearing another individual say, "No, you're great at that!" often doesn't speak to those underlying fears. In fact, it can *add* to the stressful feelings of being an impostor, as in, "No one around me realizes that I *really* don't know what I'm doing, and they are all counting on me to pull this off—but I can't!"

Second, if you help team members and mentees through their self-doubt with compliments or reassurances, the solution requires you, or someone like you. You're giving your people a fish, but you aren't teaching them how to fish. You haven't given them tools to navigate self-doubt on their

GANDEE VASAN/GETTY IMAGES

Talk about the difference between the inner critic and more-realistic thinking.

Get to Know Your Inner Critic

How the voice in your head compares with realistic thinking

INNER CRITIC	REALISTIC THINKING
Very sure it knows the truth of the situation	Curious and conscious of the many unknowns in the situation
Asks yes/no questions: *Is it possible?*	Asks open-ended questions: *How might this be possible? What part is possible?*
Focuses on problems	Seeks solutions
Sounds anxious and pessimistic in tone	Sounds calmer and generative in tone
Thinks in extreme black-and-white terms	Able to see subtlety and gray
Is repetitive	Is forward moving

own. That's what they really need, because they will make most of their inner-critic-driven decisions quickly, in their own heads, without talking to anyone.

An Alternative Approach

Another option is to take the conversation up a level. Instead of arguing with your team members' inner critics, you can introduce a conversation *about* self-doubt—what it is, why it shows up for each of us, and how it can impact what you achieve as a team. You can do this with two steps:

1. **Introduce the idea of the inner critic.** You might choose to call it "impostor syndrome," "the voice of self-doubt," "monkey mind," or another term you feel is appropriate for your work context.

What's key is to introduce the concept of a voice in our heads that does not reflect realistic thinking and anxiously and irrationally underestimates our own capabilities. Use the list above of the common qualities of an inner critic's voice to help your people identify their critics. You can also use it to talk about the difference between the inner critic and more-realistic thinking.

2. **Ask your team members to start developing the skill of managing their inner critics.** Clarify that you understand that fears and self-doubts will naturally come up when your team members or mentees grow into new roles, take on greater responsibility, or speak up. The goal you want them to work toward is not unfailing confidence but rather more skillful management of their own limiting beliefs and self-doubts.

In doing this, you are introducing a powerful new idea: that readiness for advancement and leadership does not depend on an innate quality of confidence but rather on building the skill of managing one's own self-doubts.

To do this, they should practice noticing when they're hearing their critic and naming the critical thoughts as such when they occur. That's as simple as noting to oneself, "I'm hearing my inner critic's worries about this again."

Typically, once someone understands the fear-based roots of the critic's voice and is conscious of when it's speaking up, they can choose to take direction not from that voice but from the more resourceful and rational parts of themselves instead.

One woman in my course, a manager at a telecommunications company, brought a small group of her colleagues together for this conversation. One colleague told her afterward, "I knew I had a little, mean, nagging voice inside my head, but until now I hadn't really appreciated how much impact it had on the choices I make." Another realized she was not applying for an available promotion largely because of her inner critic. After the discussion, she applied for the job—and got it.

Grace, an executive at a professional services firm, worked with a manager who was dealing with major changes in the scope of her role, activating the manager's inner critic. "In addition to encouraging her," Grace says, "we spent time digging through how the changes had triggered her inner critic. We made a clear plan for what she needed to accomplish. Many milestones were reached, and celebrated, but when things didn't go to plan, we explored whether and how the manager's inner critic was factoring in. As time went on, she learned to better predict when her

inner critic might kick in and how it could be quieted. She gained a tool she can rely upon and navigated challenging times of change with flying colors.

You want your people to do all they are capable of, to keep saying "yes" to being on their growing edge. That means they'll frequently feel self-doubt. You can empower them by addressing the inner critic head-on and giving them tools to become skillful responders to their own self-doubt.

Originally published on HBR.org October 1, 2015

HBR Reprint H02DB8

Tara Mohr *is an expert on women's leadership and the author of* Playing Big: Find Your Voice, Your Mission, Your Message *(Penguin, 2015), named a Best Book of the Year by Apple's iBooks. She is the creator of the Playing Big Facilitators Training program for coaches, mentors, managers, and leadership development professionals who want to support women in playing bigger.*

STURTI/GETTY IMAGES

3. Four Ways to Combat Impostor Syndrome on Your Team

→ by RICHARD GARDNER and JEFF BEDNAR

GIVING EMPLOYEES confidence, reassurance, and support can be a challenging task for any manager, especially when employees falsely perceive that they're underqualified, lack necessary skills, or simply lucked out getting an assignment or promotion. Given the prevalence of impostor feelings, you're probably managing people who feel this way.

For example, Mary (not her real name) was a talented professional working for a major corporation. She was hired out of college into a role that was somewhat related to her degree and was surrounded by colleagues who had graduated from more prestigious universities with degrees more directly related to their work. She worked her way up in her division, receiving stellar evaluations from her superiors and peers. Yet in her mind, she was in way over her head and her colleagues were much more knowledgeable. She was terrified that someone would find out how little she truly knew. This became even worse when she was promoted to manage her division.

Mary would stay up late at night reading leadership articles and technical hand-

Performance feedback, both formal and informal, can dispel uncertainties about an employee's "standing" in an organization.

books to ensure she would always appear well informed in meetings. Although she continued to receive excellent evaluations, this fear of being discovered as a fraud continually gnawed at her psyche. In short, she felt like an impostor.

One day she confided in her manager how out of place she felt. Her manager was shocked because everything appeared to be going so well, and she worried that Mary was unhappy and they were at risk of losing her. She helped facilitate a horizontal change in Mary's assignment within the organization, but the change didn't help Mary's impostor feelings. In fact, it only made things worse. She ultimately left the organization despite being a top performer and a beloved colleague.

Could her manager have done anything to prevent her from leaving? Not likely. By the time Mary shared how she was feeling, it was too late. Her insecurities were so internalized that her manager could do little to alleviate her concerns. That's why it's so important to be proactive. For the past six years, we have been researching and teaching about the impostor phenomenon. We've identified four tactics managers can use to reduce impostor feelings on their team.

Watch for red flags. Chances are, your employees aren't sharing their impostor feelings with you, so you need to know what behaviors to look out for. Unsustainable work habits, such as constantly working long hours, can be a telltale sign. Inviting a conversation about whether the employee is being ambitious or compensating for impostor feelings can be transformative.

Also, be aware of disengaging work habits, such as withdrawal from a social group, hesitancy to ask questions or speak up, or persistent excuses for falling behind on deadlines. These can all be signs that someone is trying to hide their insecurities. Initiating dialogue with employees early on can prevent the seeds of self-doubt from growing.

Frame performance, growth, and development in objective terms. Impostor feelings are deeply connected to the way individuals see themselves and compare themselves with others. Perceived impostors often view themselves as severely lacking but see "everyone else" as competent. People with impostor feelings do not fear opportunities and challenging work assignments; however, they may measure their success by making comparisons to an unrealistic or skewed measuring stick.

Managers can combat this comparative inclination by framing performance, growth, and development in more-objective terms rather than by competitive rank and status. Performance feedback, both formal and informal, can dispel uncertainties about an employee's "standing" in the organization.

We all know the adage, "Fake it till you make it." You may have even offered it as advice to someone who was feeling insecure. The problem with this advice is that it reminds impostors that they are in fact "faking it." It's important to help employees understand, "You've made it, and you don't need to fake it." Help them internalize successes and understand that learning and mistakes are expected as part of their growth and development.

Assign mentors wisely. Mentorship can help combat impostor feelings. But not all mentors have the same effect—and some can even make things worse. People with impostor feelings often worry about how their team members perceive them, so mixing evaluation and mentorship can be especially damaging. If you're pairing one of your employees with a mentor, consider individuals outside your team who understand the context but have no evaluative relationship with the employee. This will take the pressure off the relationship.

Share your own professional insecurities. When we ask people if they share their impostor feelings with team members or leaders, the response, with few exceptions, is an emphatic "no!" However, when we ask people how they would coach someone else with impostor feelings, they often say they would share their experiences and help normalize what they're experiencing. This presents a sharing paradox: People benefit from hearing about others' impostor feelings, but people with impostor feelings are hesitant to share their struggles.

You can combat this by normalizing impostor feelings on your team. Share some of your own professional insecurities and failures, particularly those failures that you overcame in a meaningful way. As Gia Storms writes in her HBR article "To Inspire Your Team, Share More of

Yourself" (September 21, 2021), "Stories of failure help us relate, normalize setbacks, and create intimacy. When they end with a lesson in resiliency, they galvanize audiences to keep going."

In sum, we believe managers are in an important position to help (or harm!) employees who may be wrestling with impostor feelings. Although impostor feelings can be hard to detect, by applying some of these tactics, managers can mitigate these feelings on their team and boost their employees' confidence.

Originally published on HBR.org October 18, 2022

HBR Reprint H07AAQ

Richard Gardner *is an associate professor of management in the Lee Business School at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He researches topics related to dysfunctional behaviors and attitudes of individuals in the workplace such as impostor feelings, abusive supervisors, and unethical behaviors.* ***Jeff Bednar*** *is an associate professor of management in the Marriott School of Business at Brigham Young University. His research focuses on how individuals and collectives construct and maintain their identities and respond to various identity challenges.*

MARYSIA MACHULSKA

4. Stop Telling Women They Have Impostor Syndrome

→ by RUCHIKA TULSHYAN and JODI-ANN BUREY

TALISA LAVARRY WAS exhausted. She had been leading the charge at her corporate-event-management company to plan a high-profile, security-intensive event, working around the clock and through weekends for months. Barack Obama was the keynote speaker.

Lavarry knew how to handle the complicated logistics required—but not the office politics. A golden opportunity to prove her expertise had turned into a living nightmare. Her colleagues interrogated and censured her, calling her professionalism into question. Their bullying, both subtle and overt, haunted each decision she made. Lavarry wondered whether her race had something to do with how she was treated. She was, after all, the only Black woman on her team. She began doubting whether she was qualified for the job, despite constant praise from the client.

Things with her planning team became so acrimonious that Lavarry found herself demoted from lead to colead and was eventually unacknowledged altogether by her colleagues. Each action that chipped away at her role in her work doubly chipped away at her confidence. She became plagued by deep anxiety, self-hatred, and the feeling that she was a fraud.

What had started as healthy nervousness—Will

Impostor syndrome directs our view toward fixing *women* at work instead of fixing the *places* where women work.

I fit in? Will my colleagues like me? Can I do good work?—became a workplace-induced trauma that had her contemplating suicide.

Lavarry has since written a book about her experience, *Confessions from Your Token Black Colleague* (Yum Yum Morale, 2020). When she reflects on the impostor syndrome she fell prey to during that time, she knows it wasn't a lack of self-confidence that held her back. It was repeatedly facing systemic racism and bias.

Examining Impostor Syndrome as We Know It

"Impostor syndrome" is loosely defined as doubting your abilities and feeling like a fraud. It disproportionately affects high-achieving people, who find it difficult to accept their accomplishments. Many question whether they deserve the accolades.

Psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes developed the concept, originally termed "impostor phenomenon," in their 1978 founding study, which focused on high-achieving women. They posited that "despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the impostor phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise." Their findings spurred decades of thought leadership, programs, and initiatives to address impostor syndrome in women. Even famous women—from Hollywood superstars such as Charlize Theron and Viola Davis to business leaders such as Sheryl Sandberg, and even former First Lady Michelle Obama and Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor—have confessed to experiencing it. A Google search yields more than 5 million results and shows solutions ranging from attending conferences to reading books to reciting one's accomplishments in front of a mirror. What's less explored is why impostor syndrome exists in the first place and what role workplace systems play in fostering and exacerbating it in women. We think there's room to question impostor syndrome as the reason women may be inclined to distrust their success.

The impact of systemic racism, classism, xenophobia, and other biases was categorically absent when the concept of impostor syndrome was developed. Many groups were excluded from the study, namely women of color and people of various income levels, genders, and professional backgrounds. Even as we know it today, impostor syndrome puts the blame on individuals, without accounting for the historical and cultural contexts that are foundational to how it manifests in both women of color and white women. Impostor syndrome directs our view toward fixing *women* at work instead of fixing the *places* where women work.

Feeling Unsure Shouldn't Make You an Impostor

Impostor syndrome took a fairly universal feeling of discomfort, second-guessing, and mild anxiety in the workplace and pathologized it, especially for women. As white men progress, their feelings of doubt usually abate as their work and intelligence are validated over time. They can find role models who are like them, and others usually don't question their competence, contributions, or leadership style. Women experience the opposite. Rarely are they invited to a women's career development conference where a session on "overcoming impostor syndrome" is not on the agenda.

The label of impostor syndrome is a heavy load to bear. "Impostor" brings a tinge of criminal fraudulence to the feeling of simply being unsure or anxious about joining a new team or learning a new skill. Add to that the medical undertone of "syndrome," which recalls the "female hysteria" diagnoses of the 19th century. Although feelings of uncertainty are an expected and normal part of professional life, women who experience them are deemed to *suffer* from impostor syndrome. Even if women demonstrate strength, ambition, and resilience, their daily battles with microaggressions—especially expectations and assumptions formed by stereotypes and racism—often push them down. Impostor syndrome as a concept fails to capture this dynamic and puts the onus on women to deal with the effects. Workplaces remain misdirected toward seeking individual solutions for issues disproportionately caused by systems of discrimination and abuses of power.

Bias and Exclusion Exacerbate Feelings of Doubt

For women of color, self-doubt and the feeling that they don't belong in corporate workplaces can be even more pronounced—not because women of color (a broad, imprecise cate-

Impostor syndrome took a fairly universal feeling of discomfort, second-guessing, and mild anxiety in the workplace and pathologized it, especially for women.

gorization) have an innate deficiency but because the intersection of their race and gender often places them in a precarious position at work. Many women of color across the world are implicitly, if not explicitly, told they don't belong in white- and male-dominated workplaces. Half of the women of color surveyed by Working Mother Media plan to leave their jobs in the next two years, citing feelings of marginalization or disillusionment, which is consistent with our experiences. Exclusion that exacerbated self-doubt was a key reason for each of their transitions from corporate workplaces to entrepreneurship.

"Who is deemed 'professional' is an assessment process that's culturally biased and skewed," said Tina Opie, an associate professor at Babson College, in an interview last year. When employees from marginalized backgrounds try to hold themselves up to a standard that no one like them has met (and that they're often not expected to meet), the pressure to excel can become too much to bear. The once-engaged Latina woman suddenly becomes quiet in meetings. The Indian woman who was a sure shot for promotion gets vague feedback about lacking leadership presence. The trans woman who always spoke up doesn't anymore because her manager makes gender-insensitive remarks. The Black woman whose questions once helped create better products for the organization doesn't feel safe contributing feedback after being told she's not a team player. For women of color, universal feelings of doubt become magnified by chronic battles with systemic bias and racism.

In truth, women of color don't belong because they were never supposed to belong. Their presence in most of these spaces is a result of decades of grassroots activism and begrudgingly developed legislation. Academic institutions and corporations are still mired in the cultural inertia of the "good ol' boys clubs" and white supremacy. Biased practices across institutions routinely stymie the ability of individuals from underrepresented groups to truly thrive.

The answer to overcoming impostor syndrome is not to fix individuals but to create an environment that fosters a variety of leadership styles and in which diverse racial, ethnic, and gender identities are seen as just as professional as the current model, which Opie describes as usually "Eurocentric, masculine, and heteronormative."

Confidence Doesn't Equal Competence

We often falsely equate confidence—most often, the type demonstrated by white male leaders—with competence and leadership. Employees who can't (or won't) conform to male-biased social styles are told they have impostor syndrome. According to organizational psychologist Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic: "The truth of the matter is that pretty much anywhere in the world men tend to think that they are much smarter than women. Yet arrogance and overconfidence are inversely related to leadership talent—the ability to build and maintain high-performing teams, and to inspire followers to set aside their selfish agendas in order to work for the common interest of the group."

The same systems that reward confidence in male leaders, even if they're incompetent, punish white women for lacking confidence, women of color for showing too much of it, and all women for demonstrating it in a way that's deemed unacceptable. These biases are insidious and complex and stem from narrow definitions of acceptable behavior drawn from white male models of leadership. Research from Kecia M. Thomas finds that too often women of color enter their companies as "pets" but are treated as threats once they gain influence in their roles. Women of color are by no means a monolith, but they are often linked by their common experiences of navigating stereotypes that hold them back from reaching their full potential.

Fixing Bias, Not Women

Impostor syndrome is especially prevalent in biased, toxic cultures that value individualism and overwork. Yet the "fix women's impostor syndrome" narrative has persisted, decade after decade. We see inclusive workplaces as a multivitamin that can ensure that women of color can thrive. Rather than focusing on fixing impostor syndrome, professionals whose identities have been marginalized and discriminated against must experience a cultural shift writ large.

Leaders must create a culture for women and people of color that addresses systemic bias and racism. Only by doing so can we reduce the experiences that culminate in so-called impostor syndrome among employees from mar-

ginalized communities—or at the very least, help those employees channel healthy self-doubt into positive motivation, which is best fostered within a supportive work culture.

Perhaps then we can stop misdiagnosing women with impostor syndrome once and for all.

Originally published on HBR.org February 11, 2021

HBR Reprint H066HL

***Ruchika Tulshyan** is the author of* Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work *(MIT Press, 2022) and the founder of Candour, an inclusion strategy firm.* ***Jodi-Ann Burey** is a sought-after speaker and writer who works at the intersections of race, culture, and health equity. She is the creator and host of* Black Cancer, *a podcast about the lives of people of color through their cancer journeys. Her TEDx talk, "The Myth of Bringing Your Full Authentic Self to Work," embodies her disruption of traditional narratives about racism at work.*

SKIZZOMAT

5. End Impostor Syndrome in Your Workplace

→ by RUCHIKA TULSHYAN and JODI-ANN BUREY

IN FEBRUARY 2021, we offered one simple idea: Stop telling women they have impostor syndrome. Since then, fixing the *places* where women work instead of fixing *women* at work has become a rallying cry for women of all races across the world. More than that, the pushback against impostor syndrome continues the push toward sustainable, systemic solutions to ensure work is a place where our most underrepresented employees can belong and thrive.

Since the article went viral, we've been frequently asked: If we're not supposed to diagnose women with impostor syndrome, then what? How can workplace leaders step up to create an environment where impostor syndrome doesn't exist?

Here's how managers can make it happen.

Pivot the Language Employees Use to Describe Themselves

We must take seriously the language we use to describe our experiences at work. If members of your team describe having feelings of impostor syndrome, or even name it directly, listen intently. Honest conversations about what it takes to "win" in your company culture can help your team members adjust inaccurate self-assessments. Share your own experiences of impostor syndrome and highlight the conditions that triggered that response, such as chronic underrepresentation, uncredited work efforts, and microaggressions. Likewise, probe your team members

more about their experiences at the company that led them to discount their success or feel like they don't belong.

While supporting your team members individually is important, take a "both/and" approach to meeting their unique needs while also making the organizational shifts required to address impostor syndrome at its true source. "It's easier to set up a professional development program, put money into training, or even pay for a coach or a mentor rather than think about the values, ideologies, and subsequent practices amidst the severe underrepresentation in organizations that create impostor syndrome as a mainstay," says Kecia M. Thomas, an industrial organizational psychologist and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Developing structural solutions that address impostor syndrome triggers sets you on a path to helping make sustainable, systemic changes that can support others who share these experiences.

Be Honest About the Impact of Bias

We must be honest about our professional landscape as it stands today: There are multiple models of leadership and confidence for men, but not many for women of color. Male leadership models range from raging tempers (former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer) to soft-spoken (Google CEO Sundar Pichai), from sharp suits (French president Emmanuel Macron) to hoodies and jeans (Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg). We give far more latitude to a number of ways men show up and appear in the workplace. Leaders with underrepresented identities then find themselves walking the tightrope bias and approach their self-expression and leadership styles with strategic intention. Discrimination and bias shape our expectations of how leaders should look, sound, and act, making an invisible impact on seemingly neutral terms like "professionalism."

"What does 'executive presence' even mean? When 46 out of 46 American presidents have been male and straight and 45 have been white, what do we automatically think when we say 'presidential'?" questions Siri Chilazi, a research fellow at the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard Kennedy School. A history of "think male, think leader" has been a pervasive barrier to accepting that women are perfectly capable leaders even if they express self-doubt or hesitation. We must widen definitions of "leadership" and the words we use to describe leaders.

"The Eurocentric model of professionalism is a cage for everyone, most tightly constraining Black women," says Tina Opie, an associate professor of management at Babson College and the founder of Opie Consulting Group. Opie has faced colleagues' bias for wearing her natural hair in the workplace. Jodi-Ann, who's hosted webinars on navigating racial microaggressions for thousands of professional women of color, noted that the most common racial microaggressions among participants were about hair touching or comments about their hair. Hair is a main signifier of racial difference in the United States and still stands in many states as legal grounds for workplace discrimination—a cause the CROWN Act is working to address.

The onus is on managers with employees from underrepresented backgrounds to spend time understanding that the frameworks determining these standards are already rigged against women, especially women of color, and most likely reinforce self-doubt and unbelonging. Understanding the unique challenges faced by people who are different from them builds the managers' capacity to fully grow in their roles. Managers cannot be considered effective if they can only manage employees who are like them.

For managers with underrepresented identities, Thomas acknowledges that "every move to a new position of leadership just narrows the number of people who can be considered peers or in a cohort. Layer on top of that being the only one just exacerbates that sense of isolation." As these managers advise their team members about what worked for them, "we have to also be mindful that sometimes we get to positions of leadership as a reward for towing the status quo," Thomas adds. All managers, including those who share social identities with people on their team, must help filter out and address biased decision-making and communication to their employees. Bias isn't just something *other* people do; understanding these frameworks helps managers address their own biases as well.

Reduce Biases Against Women of Color at Work

Both of us entered our jobs at more junior levels. Armed with recognized graduate degrees, we expressed our ideas freely, raised our hands for plum assignments, and expressed our ambitions openly. But as we encountered more pushback, especially from our white counterparts, our behaviors slowly changed. Ruchika started pulling back, speaking less in meetings and quietly guarding her ambitions. Jodi-Ann

A history of "think male, think leader" has been a pervasive barrier to accepting that women are perfectly capable leaders even if they express self-doubt.

searched for reprieve across sectors and industries to little avail until she, like a rapidly growing number of women of color, branched out as an entrepreneur. According to the American Express 2019 State of Women-Owned Business Report, women of color make up 89% of the net new women-owned businesses per day, while comprising only 39% of the total female U.S. population. Despite wide disparities in women of color's access to capital for these businesses, many find they would rather take the risk to escape from toxic and biased workplace cultures.

Our experiences are consistent with research. Chilazi recalls a yearlong research study in a large multinational company where her team studied the most senior people in the organization. "Despite the fact that the men and women we looked at were incredibly accomplished, women systematically reported much worse experiences than the men, and lower perception of fairness of the organization overall," she says.

Much of it is the "death by a thousand cuts" phenomenon where women were told conflicting pieces of feedback, like "Don't be so aggressive—but speak up and pound the table. Be assertive and show that you're a leader—but don't override other people," Chilazi says. "Then, as they rise up the ranks, women see men in lower-seniority positions making more money than them, and at some point women decide they don't need to deal with this," she adds. Her study found that many high-potential women started leaving the organization—not because they lacked ambition or experience but because the experience of cumulative bias wore them down until often a final incident "broke the camel's back."

"Our experiences create us," says La'Kita Williams, an organizational designer and the founder of CoCreate Work. In her work with start-up founders, Williams finds that women across races "typically create organizations where it's a priority for people to feel more fulfilled and more like themselves." As a result, "we're building different systems where people can bring the fuller version of their experiences, talents, and backgrounds and the way that they communicate to these businesses." When we receive the message that *our* leadership isn't welcome, it's no surprise women of color start pulling back or even away from their employers.

Reducing bias against women at work requires action at all levels, including in interpersonal relationships. Individual women spoke to us about how managers could help them overcome feelings of self-doubt by reinforcing their own belief in their abilities and chances of success, using phrases like "I know you can lead this big project. I've seen you succeed before, and I believe in you." It also helped when managers expressly said that they would support them. Most of all, managers best supported women by genuinely listening to their experiences of gender and/or racial bias and expressing the view that it was the organization's responsibility to fix it.

Managers can also help change how other people perceive their team members. For example, if a colleague warns of your team member's contrarian approach in meetings, you can easily assert the value of their social style by saying something like, "Contrarian? I would not put it that way, but I will say how much I really enjoy having her on my team. I can always count on her to think deeper about our work and offer new insights and perspectives."

Be Data-Driven and Rigorous

Seek to understand bias and your role in reducing it, but don't stop there. Act on that understanding to create a measurable impact on your employees' day-to-day experiences at work.

Many leaders hesitate to assess their workplace cultures for bias and exclusion for fear that it will upset employees or set expectations for quick fixes. Despite these concerns, asking direct questions about bias can help answer the question on everyone's mind: What can we do? Start by understanding what may be the specific processes that create barriers for women and people of color, which may have been written off as individuals' impostor syndrome.

As Chilazi reminds us, many organizations employ rigorous measures when launching new products, such as doing market research, going through multiple rounds of testing, identifying challenges and barriers, setting goals to overcome them, and collecting customer feedback. She questions: "Why not manage talent and inclusion in the same way?" Our organizations spend inordinate resources to know so much. They should use that

When leaders take responsibility for tackling the impostor syndrome issue by creating more-inclusive environments—not trying to fix individual women—everyone stands to benefit.

research to understand how our systems and practices harm the women and people of color on our teams.

We recommend two places to start. First, measure employee sentiment through anonymous feedback surveys—both at dedicated times throughout the year to capture trends as well as through "always on" surveys that allow employees to share feedback at any point in time. Include questions about how much employees feel like they can contribute to and grow and learn at the organization, as well as about the barriers to doing those things. Assess the data not just by gender (as many companies do now) but also by race and the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, and other marginalized identities where possible. If women of color, especially Black women, report that they don't feel like they belong in or can grow at the organization, consider this your canary in the coal mine. How Black women experience your organizational culture may serve as the litmus for the inclusion levels at your company. Instead of seeing the experiences of the most underrepresented as outliers to the data, center them to drive the next steps for organizational change.

Second, assess your organization's performance criteria and average time to promotion. If the last 10 promotions were largely of white men, and their average time to promotion is much shorter than that of women and people of color, then it's not uncommon for those women and people of color to ask themselves, "Do I have what it takes to advance here? Do I belong here?" If your company rewards vague traits like "executive presence" and "leadership skills" without measurable behaviors and skills, bias will probably creep into advancement decisions. If only white men are promoted as a result of those advancement criteria, then the process is systemically racially inequitable. It's not uncommon for a woman of color to then believe that she lacks those traits, which is likely to overfeed benign feelings of self-doubt. Unfortunately, instead of addressing this at an organizational level, managers often allow their employees to question themselves and then support them with solutions to address that self-doubt. Instead, expand your skills in race- and gender-coded language and create advancement criteria that measure tangible outcomes, skills, and behaviors. Then, promote accordingly.

Quit Gaslighting and Listen

Gaslighting, a type of psychological manipulation that causes one to question their own reality, can take many forms in the workplace. When it comes to women of all races and people of color of all genders, acknowledging impostor syndrome without naming its context within systems of racism and bias is arguably a form of gaslighting.

Jodi-Ann likens it to making several failed attempts to open an unfamiliar door. You may question whether to push or pull. When that fails, you might question whether the door is too heavy or its handle too slippery. Problem-solving to open the door falls mostly on questioning your own abilities before you ever resolve that the door is actually just locked. Likewise, it's a form of gaslighting when employees whose identities are consistently marginalized are advised on various ways *they* can change their strategies to open the door. Instead, managers must be transparent about the organization's locked doors—the barriers that exist due to biases. This helps build the trust needed to better support underrepresented members of your team. Honesty reciprocates. Listen to your employees without doubt. It's the work of managers to leverage their influence to open doors for their employees and keep them open for others like them.

Sponsor and Mentor Women of Color

We often fail to recognize the outsized role of support, advocacy, mentoring, and coaching that advances men's careers. "Most men also don't walk into the workplace on day one and say, 'Here I am, I deserve to be CEO, I've got everything it takes,'" says Chilazi. "But they are getting reinforcement from senior people who see themselves reflected in them. We've completely failed to take into account the role of all that constant reinforcement and encouragement in making men confident and self-promoting." Men, especially white men, learn that confidence from the reinforcement they receive in the workplace.

To strive for a culture of inclusion, more managers and leaders must offer women of color equal support and reinforcement. In environments where we receive the sponsorship we

need to succeed, there's more likelihood that we will, without expending energy determining whether and how to belong. In the HBR article "Don't Just Mentor Women and People of Color—Sponsor Them" (June 30, 2021), Rosalind Chow highlights the ABCDs of sponsorship: Managers must amplify, boost, connect, and defend women and people of color to sponsor them, not just mentor them.

Set Up Accountability Mechanisms for Change

When women of color don't see leaders who look like them, they often assume there's no place for them in the executive ranks—or that the reward of getting there isn't worth the cost of their health, self-worth, and well-being. Not only can this fortify insecurity and self-doubt that they "couldn't cut it," but it may also contribute to colleagues and managers treating them as if they might not belong in or want to aspire to these leadership positions.

From the most senior leadership positions to the most junior roles, organizations seeing high levels of impostor syndrome among their employees—through both anecdotal and quantitative data—should interpret that data as a call to action for structural change. Actions may include:

- Evaluating all employees on how their work performance advanced DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion)-specific company goals
- Making current and past demographic data publicly available, including measures on pay equity across race, sex, ability, and other key indicators
- Empowering the chief diversity officer with direct reporting to the CEO, a healthy budget, and clear decision-making authority
- Mandating a minimum threshold for participation in year-round educational and cultural awareness–building activities
- Implementing performance improvement plans with associated consequences for employees struggling to meet expectations for fostering a welcoming, inclusive, and psychologically safe work environment for all employees across social identities

Listening tours, culture surveys, and other means of gaining insights into employees' experiences are valuable tools in DEI strategy development. However, companies often treat gathering employee feedback as the goal itself, not a means to an end. Companies may offer training on DEI principles, but resist the uptake of that training to shift the policies and practices creating inequity at work.

"For any other type of training, we expect that we would attend to the climate for training transfer," Thomas attests. "What I mean by that is, I don't teach someone how to use Excel and then put them back in a workplace where they don't have computers. We train people around these issues, and then we put them back in the context where they're the only one trained and no one else knows what they've learned, and there are no rewards for using that training. And in fact, you may be discouraged or restricted from using that training if it is perceived as disruptive. And that's the organization's responsibility."

Organizational change becomes sustainable and effective when managers at all levels are held accountable to those changes. Without accountability mechanisms in place that reward change, "there's very little motivation," says Thomas. When leaders take responsibility for tackling the impostor syndrome issue by creating more-inclusive environments—not trying to fix individual women—everyone stands to benefit. And workplace cultures that foster impostor syndrome risk losing key talent.

Let's stop calling natural human tendencies of self-doubt, hesitation, and lack of confidence "impostor syndrome." If you want women to lend their full talents and expertise, question the culture at work—not their confidence at work. Recognize and celebrate a variety of different leadership styles and create work cultures where all are welcome and thrive.

Originally published on HBR.org July 14, 2021

HBR Reprint H06GYS

Ruchika Tulshyan *is the author of* Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work *(MIT Press, 2022) and the founder of Candour, an inclusion strategy firm.* ***Jodi-Ann Burey*** *is a sought-after speaker and writer who works at the intersections of race, culture, and health equity. She is the creator and host of* Black Cancer, *a podcast about the lives of people of color through their cancer journeys. Her TEDx talk, "The Myth of Bringing Your Full Authentic Self to Work," embodies her disruption of traditional narratives about racism at work.*

6. Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders?

→ by TOMAS CHAMORRO-PREMUZIC

THERE ARE THREE popular explanations for the clear underrepresentation of women in management: (1) They are not capable. (2) They are not interested. (3) They are both interested and capable but unable to break the glass ceiling, an invisible career barrier based on prejudiced stereotypes that prevents women from accessing the ranks of power. Conservatives and chauvinists tend to endorse the first; liberals and feminists prefer the third; and those somewhere in the middle are usually drawn to the second. But what if they have all missed the big picture?

In my view, the main reason for the uneven management gender ratio is our inability to discern between confidence and competence. We commonly misinterpret displays of confidence as a sign of competence and are fooled into believing that men are better leaders than women. When it comes to leadership, the only advantage men have over women, from Argentina to Norway, from the U.S. to Japan, is the fact that manifestations of hubris—often masked as charisma or charm—are commonly mistaken for leadership potential and occur much more frequently in men than in women.

This is consistent with the finding that leaderless groups have a natural tendency to elect self-centered, overconfident, and narcissistic individuals as leaders, personality characteristics that are not equally common in men and women. Freud argued that the psychological process of leadership occurs because a group of people—the followers—have replaced their own narcissistic tendencies with those of the leader such that their love for the leader is a disguised form of self-love or a substitute for their inability to love themselves. "Another person's narcissism," he said, "has a great attraction for those who have renounced part of their own ... as if we envied them for maintaining a blissful state of mind."

Pretty much anywhere in the world men tend to *think* that they are much smarter than women. Yet arrogance and overconfidence are inversely related to leadership talent—the ability to build and maintain high-performing teams and to inspire followers to set aside their selfish agendas to work for the common interest of the group. Indeed, whether in sports, politics, or business, the best leaders are usually humble—and whether through nature

TROY AOSSEY/GETTY IMAGES

westMONROE

According to West Monroe's research, 40% of companies don't have an organizational structure that is flexible and adaptable to market conditions.

Our Digital Agility Model enables companies like yours to compete and win in the digital world.

Scan to benchmark your organization's digital agility or visit **westmonroe.com/digital-assessment**

or nurture, humility is a much more common feature in women than in men. For example, women outperform men on emotional intelligence, which is a strong driver of modest behaviors. Furthermore, a quantitative review of gender differences in personality involving more than 23,000 participants in 26 cultures indicated that women are more sensitive, considerate, and humble than men. An even clearer picture emerges when one examines the dark side of personality: Our normative data, which includes thousands of managers from across all industry sectors and 40 countries, shows that men are consistently more arrogant, manipulative, and risk-prone than women.

The paradoxical implication is that the same psychological characteristics that enable male managers to rise to the top of the corporate or political ladder are actually responsible for their downfall. In other words, what it takes to *get* the job is not just different from, but also the reverse of, what it takes to *do the job well*. As a result, too many incompetent people are promoted to management jobs and promoted over more competent people.

Unsurprisingly, the mythical image of a "leader" embodies many of the characteristics commonly found in personality disorders, such as narcissism (Steve Jobs or Vladimir Putin), psychopathy (fill in the name of your favorite despot here), histrionics (Richard Branson or Steve Ballmer), or Machiavellian (nearly any federal-level politician). The sad thing is not that these mythical figures do not represent the average manager, but that the average manager will fail precisely for having these characteristics.

In fact, most leaders—whether in politics or business—fail. The majority of nations, companies, societies, and organizations are poorly managed, as indicated by their longevity, revenues, and approval ratings, or by the effects they have on their citizens, employees, subordinates, or members. Good leadership has always been the exception, not the norm.

So it struck me as a little odd that so much of the recent debate over getting women to "lean in" has focused on getting them to adopt more of these dysfunctional leadership traits. Yes, we often choose these types of people as our leaders—but should we?

Most of the character traits that are truly advantageous for effective leadership are predominantly found in those who fail to impress others with their management talent. This is especially true for women. There is now compelling scientific evidence that women are more likely to adopt more-effective leadership strategies than men. Most notably, in a comprehensive review of studies, Alice Eagly and colleagues showed that female managers are more likely to elicit respect and pride from their followers, communicate their vision effectively, empower and mentor subordinates, and approach problem-solving in a more flexible and creative way (all characteristics of "transformational leadership"), as well as fairly reward direct reports. In contrast, male managers are statistically less likely to bond or connect with their subordinates, and they are relatively more inept at rewarding them for their actual performance. Although these findings may reflect a sampling bias that requires women to be more qualified and competent than men in order to be chosen as leaders, there is no way of really knowing until this bias is eliminated.

There is no denying that women's path to leadership positions is paved with many barriers, including a very thick glass ceiling. But a much bigger problem is the lack of career obstacles for incompetent men, and the fact that we tend to equate leadership with the very psychological features that make the average man a more inept leader than the average woman. The result is a pathological system that rewards men for their incompetence while punishing women for their competence, to everybody's detriment.

Originally published on HBR.org August 22, 2013

HBR Reprint H00B50

Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic *is the chief innovation officer at ManpowerGroup, a professor of business psychology at University College London and Columbia University, cofounder of deepersignals.com, and an associate at Harvard's Entrepreneurial Finance Lab. He is the author of* Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders? (and How to Fix It) *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2019), upon which his TED talk was based. His latest book is* I, Human: AI, Automation, and the Quest to Reclaim What Makes Us Unique *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2023).*

sas viya

Analytics in the cloud takes time and money.

SAS® Viya® saves you both.

80% of organizations have ended up moving some workloads back off the cloud.[1]
Why? Mainly cost, control and performance.

With Viya, you don't have to compromise on any of those.

SAS Viya is the AI and analytics platform built for speed and productivity. It's time to focus on making informed decisions, not worrying about unexpected costs.

Read our free e-book to discover how enterprise cloud users can achieve up to 19 times more value out of their costs using Viya.

1. *Get more value from your analytics fast: Optimized AI and analytics in the cloud*, SAS Institute, 2023.

SAS and all other SAS Institute Inc. product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of SAS Institute Inc. in the USA and other countries.
® indicates USA registration. Other brand and product names are trademarks of their respective companies. © 2023 SAS Institute Inc. All rights reserved. G258479.0423

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED MARCH–APRIL 2023

How High Achievers Overcome Their Anxiety

Strategies for escaping the most common "thought traps"

→ by MORRA AARONS-MELE

HERE'S A LITTLE secret: Some very successful people are wracked by anxiety. They worry about worst-case scenarios and every little thing that could go wrong. They stew over mistakes and unfavorably compare themselves with others. They focus on negative feedback while dismissing praise.

In many ways their anxiety is a benefit: After all, it fuels their drive, hard work, and achievement. They're prized employees precisely because they go the extra mile and are satisfied with nothing less than the best. But if left unchecked, what may seem beneficial can make someone miserable, diminishing performance and career progress.

Consider Mark Goldstein, a lawyer. A few years ago he couldn't stop imagining catastrophes, such as being sued for malpractice. He also constantly measured himself against his peers. "Our firm has about 1,800 attorneys," he recalls, "and I thought the other 1,799 were all better able to deal with the stress of our jobs and lives." To compensate, he obsessively reviewed his emails for mistakes and worked through vacations.

Nihar Chhaya tells a similar story. Despite being named one of the top 100 executive coaches in the world by the leadership coach Marshall Goldsmith, Chhaya used to routinely imagine his business faltering and question whether he'd be better off at a bigger company rather than on his own. "In my mind everyone else had it perfect," he says. "I was the one who wasn't going to excel."

I'll confess that I suffer from the same affliction. Recently asked to join an invitation-only business-book authors' group, I felt instant panic. Who was I to be included among these best-selling writers, popular TED speakers, and even a three-star general? My impostor syndrome was acute.

Many of us do this: succumb to what psychologists call *thought traps,* or what others call *cognitive distortions* or *thinking errors*—patterns of untrue and negatively biased thought so ingrained that they arise automatically to ensnare us. Then we can't see clearly, communicate effectively, or make good, reality-based decisions. And the consequences can have an adverse effect on us and the teams we lead.

Unfortunately, thought traps are exceedingly common among anxious achievers. To escape them, some people turn to overwork; others cope through drugs or alcohol, avoidance, or passive-aggressive behavior. But better solutions exist. The first step is to understand the various traps and identify which ones you're most prone to. Then you can take intentional, straightforward, research-backed steps to set yourself free.

Thought Traps and Escape Hatches

Eleven thought traps most commonly affect us at work—and you can escape each in specific ways. Most of these examples come from David Burns's classic *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* and *The Feeling Good Handbook,* though I've included a few others that seem to particularly affect anxious achievers.

All-or-nothing thinking. Burns describes this as a tendency to view things

Illustration by MICHELLE D'URBANO

as black or white. If a situation falls short of perfection in your eyes, for example, you might see it as a total failure. A common example is a job interview. All-or-nothing thinkers will leave the interview focusing on a single blunder they committed or the one thing they wish they'd said and conclude that the entire event was a bust. It's healthier to consider the interview as a whole: Sure, you wish you'd done a few things differently, but by and large it went OK. One of the best ways to respond to all-or-nothing thinking is to replace the "or" with "and." The interview had positive *and* negative moments. It was a mixture of good *and* bad.

When you're convinced that something is a complete disaster and nothing else, reach out to a trusted adviser. I usually turn to my husband or my former business partner. Both know me well and have a knack for helping me see in shades of gray rather than in my natural perfection-or-failure mindset.

Labeling. According to Burns, labeling is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking: "Instead of saying, 'I made a mistake,' you attach a negative label to yourself: 'I'm a loser.'" We all have our own go-to labels when it comes to criticizing ourselves: "failure," "incompetent," "unqualified," "undeserving."

When you ascribe the source of a problem to someone's character rather than to that person's thinking or behavior, it suggests that the situation cannot be improved. If you think you're inherently bad (*I am a failure*) rather than a normal person who makes mistakes or bad decisions (*I occasionally fail*), you've essentially given up. The same occurs when you label others. "You see them as totally bad," Burns writes. "This makes you feel hostile and...leaves little room for constructive communication."

One of the best ways to combat this thought trap (and others) is to use balanced thinking to examine the case for and against your knee-jerk assumption. Suppose you make a poor decision, and your automatic thought is *I'm such an idiot!* First, what's the evidence that you're an idiot? In this instance it's that you made the wrong call. Describe the mistake. Now consider: Is a single bad choice really proof that you're an idiot? Of course not. Documenting the opposing view also helps. Is there any evidence to indicate that you're *not* an idiot? I think you'll find plenty of things that attest to your competence and skill. If this balanced thinking points to areas in which you could improve—and they're the ones making you anxious—it's simply a sign to pay attention and put in more effort.

Jumping to conclusions. This familiar thought trap takes two forms. One is mind reading, which occurs when you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you. (*He doesn't think I deserve my promotion. I'm sure she hates me.*) The other is fortune-telling, which involves predicting that things will turn out badly even in the absence of proof. That can lead to inaction. (*Why bother trying?)*

I once thought a colleague was angry with me because she didn't smile when we passed in the hallway. It turned out that she was worried and unhappy because her kids were sick. I've also walked into presentations assuming that I was going to flub them—which made me more likely to do so. Indeed, both modes of jumping to conclusions can diminish self-esteem, productivity, relationships, and decision-making.

You can counteract this thought trap with truth. Ask yourself: "Do I have access to another person's inner thoughts? Can I really know what's going to happen in the future?" You can also remind yourself of times in the past when you jumped to conclusions and were proved wrong.

Catastrophizing. This thought trap involves reaching the worst possible conclusion on the basis of little or no evidence: That tiny blemish must be melanoma. An argument with your significant other signals the end of the relationship. A less-than-perfect performance review means you'll be fired. A catastrophist always expects the worst-case scenario, no matter the issue.

Again, this sort of thinking undermines performance. Suppose a cash-flow analysis of your business is less positive than you expected. All of a sudden you're worried that the company will tank and you'll lose your job. Although your rational brain knows that's highly unlikely, when you're stuck in this thought trap, even the most outlandish scenario seems plausible. At this point, consider advice from the award-winning author Ashley C. Ford: Anxiety is an unreliable narrator that "lies to you and tells you that everything is going to go wrong all the time." She recommends reminding yourself that "feelings are not facts."

If you're finding it hard to reason your way out of irrationality, try taking a small but meaningful action to stop the mental spiral. Consult an impartial observer who can talk you down. Or

I've heard many leaders dismiss their successes by insisting that they were a fluke resulting from luck or that anyone could have accomplished what they did.

try to move the needle just a tiny bit forward—away from catastrophe. Even a small amount of progress can nudge your brain to refocus and get back to productive work. Keep your attention on what you can do in the near term rather than on what might happen next year or even three months from now.

Filtering. Burns describes mental filtering this way: "You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors a beaker of water." As an example, he cites a presenter who gets lots of positive feedback about her talk but ignores it and instead obsesses over one colleague's critical comment.

Of course, the reverse can happen too—people may focus on what's gone right and turn a blind eye to what hasn't—but anxious achievers are more likely to dwell on the negative and fail to recognize and capitalize on all the things we do well. That leads to feeling discouraged or even hopeless.

A practical way to break out of this trap is to keep a record of your accomplishments and the praise you receive. Make a note every time you hit or exceed a target or log a win for your team or company, and retain any emails, tweets, or messages that contain positive feedback. That will provide objective proof that you're doing good work, and you can review your file whenever you're feeling overwhelmed or doubtful. (Bonus benefit: An achievement log makes self-assessments and performance reviews a snap.)

Discounting the positive. This thought trap is very similar to filtering, but I call it out because it shows up so frequently in anxious achievers. I've heard many leaders dismiss their successes by insisting that they were a fluke resulting from luck or good timing or that anyone could have accomplished what they did.

That may appear to be humility and thus not as harmful as some of the other traps, but it can cause big problems if it prevents you from repeating a triumph or trying something new. For example, a former colleague of mine fears public speaking; even though she has delivered well-received presentations, she believes that each one is a fluke, so she passes up desirable opportunities that require a more public role.

"Should" statements. *I should be further along in my career by now. It shouldn't be so hard to get ahead at this company. I should know better.* Examples of this very common thought trap, which occurs when reality hasn't met your high hopes or expectations, are endless. Statements that include the word "should" or its close relatives "must," "ought to," and "have to" can damage your mood and motivation, because, as Burns writes, they leave you feeling frustrated and rebellious rather than equipped to make changes and move toward your goals.

When you find yourself making a "should" statement, try reframing it in a gentler, less demanding way. For example, instead of *I should be further along in my career by now,* try *I'd like to be further along in my career.* Then consider whether there are actions you could take to rectify the problem. If there are, pursue them. If there aren't, you might realize that your "should" statement is unrealistic. For example,

Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM
Anxiety is an issue for some very high achievers. Although it can fuel drive, hard work, and achievement, when left unchecked it can have a detrimental effect on performance and career progress. Those who suffer from this kind of anxiety constantly worry about worst-case scenarios, hyperfocus on mistakes, and prioritize negative feedback above praise.

THE CAUSE
Anxious achievers often fall victim to 11 "thought traps," patterns of negative and often untrue thoughts that can prevent them from making good decisions.

THE SOLUTION
Understanding these traps and how best to recognize and reframe them can help free anxious individuals from a world of worry. There are specific ways to escape each trap, including some useful overarching practices such as looking for the humor in the situation and practicing self-compassion. These tools can help workers perform and feel better and become more successful leaders.

I should always be able to anticipate my boss's needs is an impossible standard.

Social comparison. Comparing yourself with others is particularly pernicious, especially when it results in fatalistic self-assessments: *He'll always have higher sales than I do. She'll always earn more money.* At work the result is unhealthy competition and heightened anxiety, which stymie collaboration and collective performance.

To reset, turn comparison into curiosity. For example, Chhaya says he's trained himself to think, *Oh, wow, that's an interesting thing they're doing. Why not try that?* or *Hey, that's worked for them but it's not really what I want to do.* The key is to focus on who you are and what you want to accomplish rather than get anxious and distracted by others' achievements.

Personalization and blaming. These are opposite expressions of the same error in thinking. Personalization occurs when you hold yourself responsible for circumstances and actions that are out of your control. For example, if one of your direct reports is struggling, you take it as evidence that you're a bad manager. Psychologists believe that we may fall into this thought trap to give ourselves the illusion of control, to avoid conflict, or to replicate a submissiveness learned in childhood.

Blaming, by contrast, consists of attributing the problem entirely to others: It's your employee's fault that he can't handle the workload. You can't understand why he doesn't observe the same high standards that you do.

A healthier response is to recognize that the truth probably lies somewhere in between—or at least requires more investigation. In a case like the one just mentioned, for instance, you should meet with your direct report, ask him what he thinks might be causing the problem, and then strategize together about potential solutions.

Ruminating. This involves obsessive, repetitive thoughts about negative events in the past, problems we're having in the present, or ones we anticipate in the future. It is a huge anxiety amplifier, and it's all too common. Who hasn't mentally replayed a careless comment, a bad decision, a hurtful incident, or a failed comeback over and over again? Who hasn't become so fixated on a challenge at work or in a relationship that it drowns out everything else?

What distinguishes rumination from helpful processing is that it doesn't provide new ways of thinking, behaving, or solving the problem. It just covers the same territory again and again, keeping us locked in a negative mindset. Future-focused rumination may *feel* good: If you're worried about a tough task, you'll work harder at it; if you're fretting about a bad outcome, you'll try your best to avoid it. But it doesn't really work that way. Obsessing will almost always leave you languishing in a pattern of inaction.

One way I interrupt ruminating is by writing my thoughts down so that I can better see when they're irrational or illogical. That motivates me to move on.

Emotional reasoning. This trap can be summed up as *I feel it, therefore it must be true.* For example: *I feel terrified about going on airplanes; it must be very dangerous to fly.* But any psychologist will tell you that feelings are actually a product of thoughts and beliefs, and if our thoughts are biased, the emotions we experience because of them won't reflect reality.

At work, emotional reasoning might show up as something like *I feel really overwhelmed by my workload, so I'm not capable of handling my job.* Unfortunately, it can drive you to an unhealthy response and become self-fulfilling. For example, if you react to feeling overwhelmed with avoidance or procrastination, you've made a bad situation worse.

Instead, as with other thought traps, you need to do what you can to get out of your head. Talk to an impartial observer and run a truth test on instances of emotional reasoning. Your feelings of incompetence, for example, are very likely to be exaggerated or false.

Dodging the Traps

I've already offered some advice on how to deal with each specific thought trap, but several overarching practices can help you avoid or escape all of them. (For most anxious achievers, I also recommend working with a good therapist.)

Make the anxiety an ally. When harnessed, this complicated emotion can become a useful source of information and ultimately a leadership advantage—but only if you better understand it. Ask yourself probing questions such as "What exactly is worrying me?" "Is it a person, a situation, or a potential outcome?" "Why am I anxious about that?"

When you identify the true source of your anxiety, you can stop acting reflexively and work with intention and focus. Chhaya says he has made peace with his "neurotic" self: "I came to grips with the fact that...this is my natural tendency and in some ways it does me a service,

When you identify the true source of your anxiety, you can stop acting reflexively and work with intention.

because it makes me think in advance about a lot of issues."

Practice self-compassion. As the psychology professor Kristin Neff has shown, replacing "self-judgment" with "self-kindness" can greatly reduce anxiety. If you approach yourself more positively, you'll feel better, think more clearly, and escape the thought traps.

Here's one exercise: Think of something you did well recently. Maybe you reached a successful outcome at work, had a thoughtful exchange with a friend, or even squeezed a workout into a busy day. Now tell yourself, *I did a good job*—and try to really feel it. Don't jump to a negative thought or a criticism or the next item on your to-do list. Bask in your accomplishment for just a bit.

See the humor. Some thought traps are truly funny if we follow them to their logical conclusions: Will your typo actually cause you to get fired? Could it possibly be solely your fault that your company didn't meet its sales goals? Of course not! If you can acknowledge that absurdity and let it amuse you, you can immediately loosen the thought trap's grip. Defang your anxiety by learning to laugh about it.

Get physical. Sometimes the best way to get out of your own head is to move your body. Run up some stairs. Stand up and stretch. Put on some music and dance. Even writing things down instead of just thinking about them can create some brain-body separation.

Try guided meditation. Experts have long recommended meditation as a way to reduce anxiety, but I've found that when I'm really stuck in a thought trap, a silent meditation practice quickly turns into ruminating—or catastrophizing, or filtering, or labeling, or whatever happens to be afflicting me that day. What may work better is guided meditation, in which another person talks you through it, thereby giving you something other than your unhelpful thinking to focus on. Magic happens when we can pause and reset.

Just say no. This one may seem too simple, but it works. When you're in a thought trap, literally interrupt it by saying "No" or "Stop" or "No, thanks" or "Not today!" The more you engage in this habit, the stronger it becomes. Your brain will learn this cue to break free of an anxiety-fueled thought before it traps you.

Your Potential, Realized

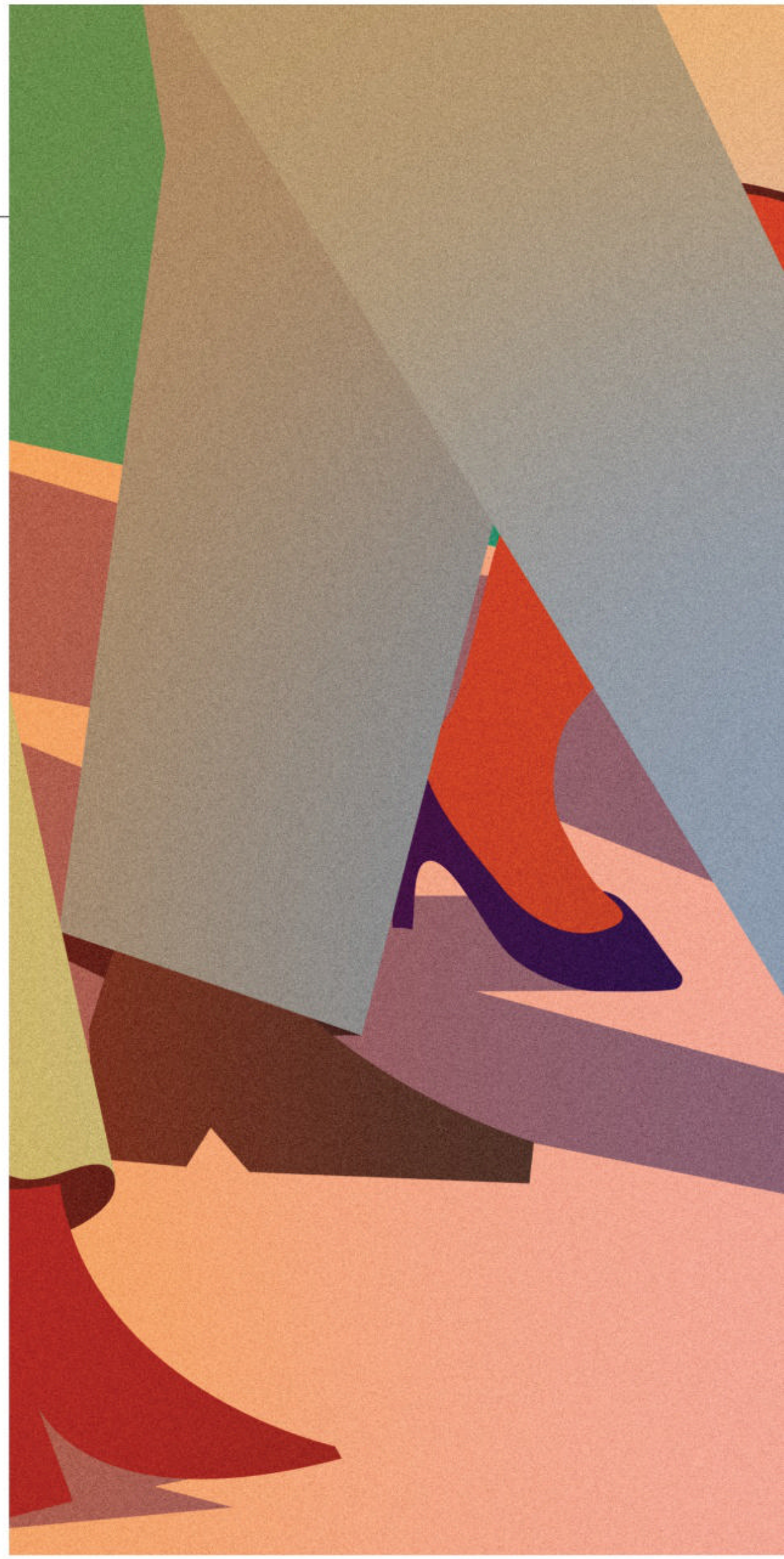
To reach your full potential, you can't let thought traps keep you in their grip. Goldstein, for one, broke free after taking a leave of absence from work to learn mindfulness and self-compassion practices. His ambition and sometimes his anxiety are still there, but he is no longer catastrophizing and stuck as a result.

Chhaya has likewise figured out how to let evidence assuage his doubts and worries: "I've succeeded with the business over the past seven years and I'm busier than ever," he explains, so "now I'm able to say I'm going to be OK."

As for me, I'm the poster child for putting my anxious-achiever persona to good use. I host a podcast and have written a book about it, and I coach others just like me. My message is simple: If we harness our anxiety and lessen its personal toll, we will help ourselves work with more energy and ingenuity. We will perform and feel better, become leaders whom people want to work for, and take the visionary risks needed to create positive change. We will achieve the same if not greater career success—without feeling constantly stressed out.

HBR Reprint R2302L

Morra Aarons-Mele *is the author of* The Anxious Achiever: Turn Your Biggest Fears Into Your Leadership Superpower *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2023), from which this article is adapted, and the host of the Anxious Achiever podcast from LinkedIn Presents.*



ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 2007

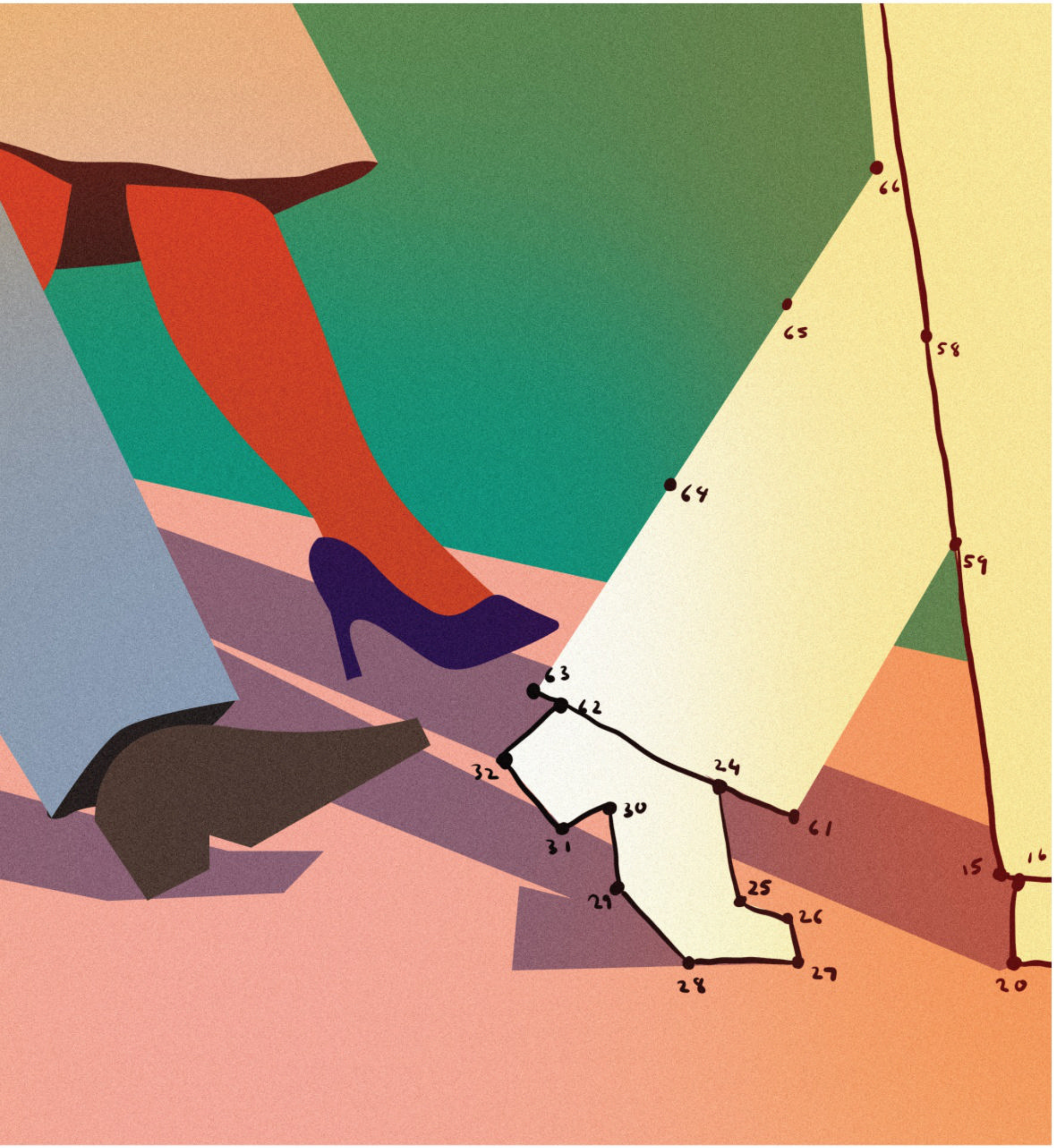
In Praise of the Incomplete Leader

No leader is perfect. The best ones don't try to be—they concentrate on honing their strengths and find others who can make up for their limitations.

→ by DEBORAH ANCONA, THOMAS W. MALONE, WANDA J. ORLIKOWSKI, and PETER M. SENGE

WE'VE COME TO EXPECT a lot of our leaders. Top executives, the thinking goes, should have the intellectual capacity to make sense of unfathomably complex issues, the imaginative powers to paint a vision of the future that generates everyone's enthusiasm, the operational know-how to translate strategy into concrete plans, and the interpersonal skills to foster commitment to undertakings that could cost people's jobs should they fail. Unfortunately, no single person can possibly live up to those standards.

Illustration by **MICHELLE D'URBANO**


66
65
58
64
59
63
62
32
24
30
61
31
15
16
29
25
26
28
27
20

Engage in Sensemaking

1. Get data from multiple sources: customers, suppliers, employees, competitors, other departments, and investors.

2. Involve others in your sensemaking. Say what you think you are seeing, and check with people who have different perspectives from yours.

3. Use early observations to shape small experiments in order to test your conclusions. Look for new ways to articulate alternatives and better ways to understand options.

4. Do not simply apply existing frameworks but instead be open to new possibilities. Try not to describe the world in stereotypical ways, such as good guys and bad guys, victims and oppressors, or marketers and engineers.

It's time to end the myth of the complete leader: the flawless person at the top who's got it all figured out. In fact, the sooner leaders stop trying to be all things to all people, the better off their organizations will be. In today's world, the executive's job is no longer to command and control but to cultivate and coordinate the actions of others at all levels of the organization. Only when leaders come to see themselves as incomplete—as having both strengths and weaknesses—will they be able to make up for their missing skills by relying on others.

Corporations have been becoming less hierarchical and more collaborative for decades, of course, as globalization and the growing importance of knowledge work have required that responsibility and initiative be distributed more widely. Moreover, it is now possible for large groups of people to coordinate their actions, not just by bringing lots of information to a few centralized places but also by bringing lots of information to lots of places through ever-growing networks within and beyond the firm. The sheer complexity and ambiguity of problems is humbling. More and more decisions are made in the context of global markets and rapidly—sometimes radically—changing financial, social, political, technological, and environmental forces. Stakeholders such as activists, regulators, and employees all have claims on organizations.

No one person could possibly stay on top of everything. But the myth of the complete leader (and the attendant fear of appearing incompetent) makes many executives try to do just that, exhausting themselves and damaging their organizations in the process. The incomplete leader, by contrast, knows when to let go: when to let those who know the local market do the advertising plan or when to let the engineering team run with its idea of what the customer needs. The incomplete leader also knows that leadership exists throughout the organizational hierarchy—wherever expertise, vision, new ideas, and commitment are found.

We've worked with hundreds of people who have struggled under the weight of the myth of the complete leader. Over the past six years, our work at the MIT Leadership Center has included studying leadership in many organizations and teaching the topic to senior executives, middle managers, and MBA students. In our practice-based programs, we have analyzed numerous accounts of organizational change and watched leaders struggle to meld top-down strategic initiatives with vibrant ideas from the rest of the organization.

All this work has led us to develop a model of distributed leadership. This framework, which synthesizes our own research with ideas from other leadership scholars, views leadership as a set of four capabilities: *sensemaking* (understanding the context in which a company and its people operate), *relating* (building relationships within and across organizations), *visioning* (creating a compelling picture of the future), and *inventing* (developing new ways to achieve the vision).

While somewhat simplified, these capabilities span the intellectual and interpersonal, the rational and intuitive, and the conceptual and creative capacities required in today's business environment. Rarely, if ever, will someone be equally skilled in all four domains. Thus, incomplete leaders differ from incompetent leaders in that they understand what they're good at and what they're not and have good judgment about how they can work with others to build on their strengths and offset their limitations.

Sometimes, leaders need to further develop the capabilities they are weakest in. The exhibits throughout this article provide some suggestions for when and how to do that. Other times, however, it's more important for leaders to find and work with others to compensate for their weaknesses. Teams and organizations—not just individuals—

Even though managers pay lip service to the importance of mutual understanding, their real focus is on winning the argument.

can use this framework to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses and find ways to balance their skill sets.

Sensemaking

The term "sensemaking" was coined by organizational psychologist Karl Weick, and it means just what it sounds like: making sense of the world around us. Leaders are constantly trying to understand the contexts they are operating in. How will new technologies reshape the industry? How will changing cultural expectations shift the role of business in society? How does the globalization of labor markets affect recruitment and expansion plans?

Weick likened the process of sensemaking to cartography. What we map depends on where we look, what factors we choose to focus on, and what aspects of the terrain we decide to represent. Since these choices will shape the kind of map we produce, there is no perfect map of a terrain. Therefore, making sense is more than an act of analysis; it's an act of creativity. (See the exhibit "Engage in Sensemaking.")

The key for leaders is to determine what would be a useful map given their particular goals and then to draw one that adequately represents the situation the organization is facing at that moment. Executives who are strong in this capability know how to quickly capture the complexities of their environment and explain them to others in simple terms. This helps ensure that everyone is working from the same map, which makes it far easier to discuss and plan for the journey ahead. Leaders need to have the courage to present a map that highlights features they believe to be critical, even if their map doesn't conform to the dominant perspective.

When John Reed was CEO of Citibank, the company found itself in a real estate crisis. At the time, common wisdom said that Citibank would need to take a $2 billion write-off, but Reed wasn't sure. He wanted a better understanding of the situation, so to map the problem, he met with federal regulators as well as his managers, the board, potential investors, economists, and real estate experts. He kept asking, "What am I missing here?" After those meetings, he had a much stronger grasp of the problem, and he recalibrated the write-off to $5 billion—which turned out to be a far more accurate estimate. Later, three quarters into the bank's eight-quarter program to deal with the crisis, Reed realized that progress had stopped. He began talking to other CEOs known for their change management skills. This informal benchmarking process led him to devise an organizational redesign.

Throughout the crisis, real estate valuations, investors' requirements, board demands, and management team expectations were all changing and constantly needed to be reassessed. Good leaders understand that sensemaking is a continuous process; they let the map emerge from a melding of observations, data, experiences, conversations, and analyses. In healthy organizations, this sort of sensemaking goes on all the time. People have ongoing dialogues about their interpretations of markets and organizational realities.

At IDEO, a product design firm, sensemaking is step one for all design teams. According to founder David

Idea in Brief

The flawless leader does not exist: Leaders cannot be all things to all people, have everything figured out, or command and control their way to results. In a global world characterized by knowledge work, responsibility is increasingly distributed more widely. The leaders who succeed in that world see their own incompleteness and know how to draw from the strength of others.

Leadership is a set of four capabilities: *Sensemaking* involves making sense of the landscape around you. *Relating* is about inquiring about others through meaningful listening, advocating by explaining your point of view, and establishing connections. *Visioning* is an ongoing process to bring the vision from sensemaking into view. And *inventing* is developing new processes that give life to the new vision.

Leaders usually show strength in some of these capabilities, but to succeed in today's world, they must identify and admit where their weaknesses are—and get input from others to ensure that all capabilities are covered.

Build Relationships

1. Spend time trying to understand others' perspectives, listening with an open mind and without judgment.

2. Encourage others to voice their opinions. What do they care about? How do they interpret what's going on? Why?

3. Before expressing your ideas, try to anticipate how others will react to them and how you might best explain them.

4. When expressing your ideas, don't just give a bottom line; explain your reasoning process.

5. Assess the strengths of your current connections: How well do you relate to others when receiving advice? When giving advice? When thinking through difficult problems? When asking for help?

Kelley, team members must act as anthropologists studying an alien culture to understand the potential product from all points of view. When brainstorming a new design, IDEO's teams consider multiple perspectives—that is, they build multiple maps to inform their creative process. One IDEO team was charged with creating a new design for an emergency room. To better understand the experience of a key stakeholder– the patient—team members attached a camera to a patient's head and captured his experience in the ER. The result: nearly ten full hours of film of the ceiling. The sensemaking provoked by this perspective led to a redesign of the ceiling that made it more aesthetically pleasing and able to display important information for patients.

Relating

Many executives who attempt to foster trust, optimism, and consensus often reap anger, cynicism, and conflict instead. That's because they have difficulty relating to others, especially those who don't make sense of the world the way they do. Traditional images of leadership didn't assign much value to relating. Flawless leaders shouldn't need to seek counsel from anyone outside their tight inner circle, the thinking went, and they were expected to issue edicts rather than connect on an emotional level. Times have changed, of course, and in this era of networks, being able to build trusting relationships is a requirement of effective leadership.

Three key ways to do this are *inquiring, advocating,* and *connecting.* The concepts of inquiring and advocating stem from the work of organizational development specialists Chris Argyris and Don Schon. Inquiring means listening with the intention of genuinely understanding the thoughts and feelings of the speaker. Here, the listener suspends judgment and tries to comprehend how and why the speaker has moved from the data of his or her experiences to particular interpretations and conclusions.

Advocating, as the term implies, means explaining one's own point of view. It is the flip side of inquiring, and it's how leaders make clear to others how they reached their interpretations and conclusions. Good leaders distinguish their observations from their opinions and judgments and explain their reasoning without aggression or defensiveness. People with strong relating skills are typically those who've found a healthy balance between inquiring and advocating: They actively try to understand others' views but are able to stand up for their own. (See the exhibit "Build Relationships.")

We've seen countless relationships undermined because people disproportionately emphasized advocating over inquiring. Even though managers pay lip service to the importance of mutual understanding and shared commitment to a course of action, often their real focus is on winning the argument rather than strengthening the connection. Worse, in many organizations, the imbalance goes so far that having one's point of view prevail is what is understood as leadership.

Effective relating does not mean avoiding interpersonal conflict altogether. Argyris and Schon found that "maintaining a smooth surface" of conviviality and apparent agreement is one of the most common defensive routines that limits team effectiveness. Balancing inquiring and advocating is ultimately about showing respect, challenging opinions, asking tough questions, and taking a stand.

Consider Twynstra Gudde (TG), one of the largest independent consulting companies in the Netherlands. A few years ago, it replaced the role of CEO with a team of four managing directors who share leadership responsibilities. Given this unique structure, it's vital that these directors effectively relate to one another. They've adopted simple rules, such as a requirement that each

Most leaders experience a profound dichotomy every day, and it's a heavy burden. They are trapped in the myth of the complete leader—the person at the top without flaws.

Cultivate Inventiveness

1. Don't assume that the way things have always been done is the best way to do them.

2. When a new task or change effort emerges, encourage creative ways of getting it done.

3. Experiment with different ways of organizing work. Find alternative methods for grouping and linking people.

4. When working to understand your current environment, ask yourself, "What other options are possible?"

return to the country of previously banned political leaders.

Few of South Africa's leaders agreed on much of anything regarding the country's future. It seemed like a long shot, at best, that a scenario-planning process convened by a black professor from the University of the Western Cape and facilitated by a white Canadian from Royal Dutch Shell would be able to bring about any sort of change. But they, together with members of the African National Congress (ANC), the radical Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and the white business community, were charged with forging a new path for South Africa.

When the team members first met, they focused on collective sensemaking. Their discussions then evolved into a yearlong visioning process. In his book, *Solving Tough Problems,* Adam Kahane, the facilitator, says the group started by telling stories of "left-wing revolution, right-wing revolts, and free market utopias." Eventually, the leadership team drafted a set of scenarios that described the many paths toward disaster and the one toward sustainable development.

They used metaphors and clear imagery to convey the various paths in language that was easy to understand. One negative scenario, for instance, was dubbed "Ostrich": A nonrepresentative white government sticks its head in the sand, trying to avoid a negotiated settlement with the black majority. Another negative scenario was labeled "Icarus": A constitutionally unconstrained black government comes to power with noble intentions and embarks on a huge, unsustainable public-spending spree that crashes the economy. This scenario contradicted the popular belief that the country was rich and could simply redistribute wealth from whites to blacks. The Icarus scenario set the stage for a fundamental (and controversial) shift in economic thinking in the ANC and other left-wing parties—a shift that led the ANC government to "strict and consistent fiscal discipline," according to Kahane.

The group's one positive scenario involved the government adopting a set of sustainable policies that would put the country on a path of inclusive growth to successfully rebuild the economy and establish democracy. This option was called "Flamingo," invoking the image of a flock of beautiful birds all taking flight together.

This process of visioning unearthed an extraordinary collective sense of possibility in South Africa. Instead of talking about what other people should do to advance some agenda, the leaders spoke about what they could do to create a better future for everyone. They didn't have an exact implementation plan at the ready, but by creating a credible vision, they paved the way for others to join in and help make their vision a reality.

Leaders who excel in visioning walk the walk; they work to embody the core values and ideas contained in the vision. Darcy Winslow, Nike's global director for women's footwear, is a good example. A 14-year veteran at Nike, Winslow previously held the position of general manager of sustainable business opportunities at the shoe and apparel giant. Her work in that role reflected her own core values, including her passion for the environment. "We had come to see that our customers' health and our own ability to compete were inseparable from the health of the environment," she says. So she initiated the concept of ecologically intelligent product design. Winslow's team worked at determining the chemical composition and environmental effects of every material and process Nike used. They visited factories in China and collected samples of rubber, leather, nylon, polyester, and foams to determine their chemical makeup. This led Winslow and her team to develop a list of "positive" materials—those that weren't harmful to the environment—that they hoped to use in more Nike products. "Environmental sustainability" was no longer just an abstract term on a vision statement; the team now felt a mandate to realize the vision.

Inventing

Even the most compelling vision will lose its power if it floats, unconnected,

above the everyday reality of organizational life. To transform a vision of the future into a present-day reality, leaders need to devise processes that will give it life. This inventing is what moves a business from the abstract world of ideas to the concrete world of implementation. In fact, inventing is similar to execution, but the label "inventing" emphasizes that this process often requires creativity to help people figure out new ways of working together.

To realize a new vision, people usually can't keep doing the same things they've been doing. They need to conceive, design, and put into practice new ways of interacting and organizing. Some of the most famous examples of large-scale organizational innovation come from the automotive industry: Henry Ford's conception of the assembly-line factory and Toyota's famed integrated production system.

More recently, Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay, invented through his company a new way of doing large-scale retailing. His vision was of an online community where users would take responsibility for what happened. In a 2001 BusinessWeek Online interview, Omidyar explained, "I had the idea that I wanted to create an efficient market and a level playing field where everyone had equal access to information. I wanted to give the power of the market back to individuals, not just large corporations. That was the driving motivation for creating eBay at the start."

Consequently, eBay outsources most of the functions of traditional retailing—purchasing, order fulfillment, and customer service, for example—to independent sellers worldwide. The company estimates that more than 430,000 people make their primary living from selling wares on eBay. If those individuals were all employees of eBay, it would be the second largest private employer in the United States after Walmart.

The people who work through eBay are essentially independent store owners, and, as such, they have a huge amount of autonomy in how they do their work. They decide what to sell, when to sell it, how to price, and how to advertise. Coupled with this individual freedom is global scale. EBay's infrastructure enables them to sell their goods all over the world. What makes eBay's inventing so radical is that it represents a new relationship between an organization and its parts. Unlike typical outsourcing, eBay doesn't pay its retailers—they pay the company.

Inventing doesn't have to occur on such a grand scale. It happens every time a person creates a way of approaching a task or figures out how to overcome a previously insurmountable obstacle. In their book *Car Launch,* George Roth and Art Kleiner describe a highly successful product development team in the automobile industry that struggled with completing its designs on time. Much of the source of the problem, the team members concluded, came from the stovepipe organizational structure found in the product development division. Even though they were a "colocated" team dedicated to designing a common new car, members were divided by their different technical expertise, experience, jargon, and norms of working.

When the team invented a mechanical prototyping device that complemented its computer-aided design tools, the group members found that it facilitated a whole new way of collaborating. Multiple groups within the team could quickly create physical mock-ups of design ideas to be tested by the various engineers from different specialties in the team. The group called the device "the harmony buck," because it helped people break out of their comfortable engineering specialties and solve interdependent design problems together. Development of a "full body" physical mock-up of the new car allowed engineers to hang around the prototype, providing a central focal point for their interactions. It enabled them to more easily identify and raise cross-functional issues, and it facilitated mutual problem solving and coordination.

In sum, leaders must be able to succeed at inventing, and this requires both attention to detail and creativity. (See the exhibit "Cultivate Inventiveness.")

Balancing the Four Capabilities

Sensemaking, relating, visioning, and inventing are interdependent. Without sensemaking, there's no common view of reality from which to start. Without relating, people work in isolation or, worse, strive toward different aims. Without visioning, there's no shared direction. And without inventing, a vision remains illusory. No one leader, however, will excel at all four capabilities in equal measure.

Typically, leaders are strong in one or two capabilities. Intel chairman Andy Grove is the quintessential sensemaker, for instance, with a gift for recognizing

Examining Your Leadership Capabilities

Few people wake up in the morning and say, "I'm a poor sensemaker" or "I just can't relate to others." They tend to experience their own weaknesses more as chronic or inexplicable failures in the organization or in those around them. The following descriptions will help you recognize opportunities to develop your leadership capabilities and identify openings for working with others.

SIGNS OF WEAK SENSEMAKING

1. You feel strongly that you are usually right and others are often wrong.

2. You feel your views describe reality correctly, but others' views do not.

3. You find you are often blindsided by changes in your organization or industry.

4. When things change, you typically feel resentful. (That's not the way it should be!)

SIGNS OF WEAK RELATING

1. You blame others for failed projects.

2. You feel others are constantly letting you down or failing to live up to your expectations.

3. You find that many of your interactions at work are unpleasant, frustrating, or argumentative.

4. You find many of the people you work with untrustworthy.

SIGNS OF WEAK VISIONING

1. You feel your work involves managing an endless series of crises.

2. You feel like you're bouncing from pillar to post with no sense of larger purpose.

3. You often wonder, "Why are we doing this?" or "Does it really matter?"

4. You can't remember the last time you talked to your family or a friend with excitement about your work.

SIGNS OF WEAK INVENTING

1. Your organization's vision seems abstract to you.

2. You have difficulty relating your company's vision to what you are doing today.

3. You notice dysfunctional gaps between your organization's aspirations and the way work is organized.

4. You find that things tend to revert to business as usual.

strategic inflection points that can be exploited for competitive advantage. Herb Kelleher, the former CEO of Southwest Airlines, excels at relating. He remarked in the journal *Leader to Leader* that "We are not afraid to talk to our people with emotion. We're not afraid to tell them, 'We love you.' Because we do." With this emotional connection comes equitable compensation and profit sharing.

Apple CEO Steve Jobs is a visionary whose ambitious dreams and persuasiveness have catalyzed remarkable successes for Apple, Next, and Pixar. Meg Whitman, the CEO of eBay, helped bring Pierre Omidyar's vision of online retailing to life by inventing ways to deal with security, vendor reliability, and product diversification.

Once leaders diagnose their own capabilities, identifying their unique set of strengths and weaknesses, they must search for others who can provide the things they're missing. (See the sidebar "Examining Your Leadership Capabilities.") Leaders who choose only people who mirror themselves are likely to find their organizations tilting in one direction, missing one or more essential capabilities needed to survive in a changing, complex world. That's why it's important to examine the whole organization to make sure it is appropriately balanced as well. It's the leader's responsibility to create an environment that lets people complement one another's strengths and offset one another's weaknesses. In this way, leadership is distributed across multiple people throughout the organization.

YEARS AGO, ONE of us attended a three-day meeting on leadership with 15 top managers from different companies. At the close of it, participants were asked to reflect on their experience as leaders. One executive, responsible for more than 50,000 people in his division of a manufacturing corporation, drew two pictures on a flip chart. The image on the left was what he projected to the outside world: It was a large, intimidating face holding up a huge fist. The im-

Even the most talented leaders require the input and leadership of others, constructively solicited and creatively applied.

age on the right represented how he saw himself: a small face with wide eyes, hair standing on end, and an expression of sheer terror.

We believe that most leaders experience that profound dichotomy every day, and it's a heavy burden. How many times have you feigned confidence to superiors or reports when you were really unsure? Have you ever felt comfortable conceding that you were confused by the latest business results or caught off guard by a competitor's move? Would you ever admit to feeling inadequate to cope with the complex issues your firm was facing? Anyone who can identify with these situations knows firsthand what it's like to be trapped in the myth of the complete leader—the person at the top without flaws. It's time to put that myth to rest, not only for the sake of frustrated leaders but also for the health of organizations. Even the most talented leaders require the input and leadership of others, constructively solicited and creatively applied. It's time to celebrate the incomplete—that is, the human—leader.

HBR Reprint R0702E

Deborah Ancona *is the Seley Distinguished Professor of Management, a professor of organizational studies, and the founder of the MIT Leadership Center at the MIT Sloan School of Management in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is also the coauthor (with Henrik Bresman) of* X-Teams: How to Build Teams that Lead, Innovate, and Succeed *(Harvard Business School Press, 2007).* ***Thomas W. Malone*** *is the Patrick J. McGovern Professor of Management at the MIT Sloan School and the director of the MIT Center for Collective Intelligence. He is also the author of* The Future of Work *(Harvard Business Press, 2004) and* Superminds *(Little Brown, 2018).* ***Wanda Orlikowski*** *is the Alfred P. Sloan Professor of Information Technologies and Organization Studies at MIT's Sloan School of Management.* ***Peter M. Senge*** *is the founding chairperson of the Society for Organizational Learning and a senior lecturer at the MIT Sloan School.*

MASTER1305/GETTY IMAGES

1. You're Not an Impostor. You're Actually Pretty Amazing.

→ by KESS ERUTEYA

DO YOU FEEL like a fraud? Many of us do. Perhaps you started a new job and believe you have less experience than you need, despite being the perfect candidate on paper. Or maybe your boss trusted you with an assignment that you feel totally unprepared to lead, regardless of your flawless track record.

This feeling has a name: impostor syndrome. Around one-third of young people suffer from it, and 70% of everyone else will probably experience it at some point in their lives.

Impostor syndrome is often tied to our identities and sense of self-worth. Back in the late 1970s psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes coined the term in a research paper, noting three critical attributes of the phenomenon:

1. Thinking that people have an exaggerated view of your abilities

2. Being afraid that you will be exposed as a fraud

3. Continuously downplaying your achievements

Impostor syndrome typically shows up when we decide to take on new roles or responsibilities and can result in feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, and guilt. Those who experience impostor syndrome may end up sabotaging their own success, obsessing over minor mistakes, or working twice as hard to prove themselves as a result.

If you are beginning a new (or first) job, or just going through a change at work, overcoming impostor syndrome may feel impossible, like trying to remove a freckle from your skin. But if you fail to manage it now, it can have a detrimental impact on your performance and lead to burnout and depression in the longer term.

Here are a few research-backed strategies that have helped me, and others, overcome these destructive

Celebrating yourself is a simple, fun way to combat impostor syndrome.

feelings. You can become a better version of yourself at work, and in life, by giving them a try.

Keep a Positive Mindset

Many of us tend to downplay our achievements. In an attempt to be humble, we brush them off by saying our success was just a product of "luck" or "good timing." While humility is admirable, too much of it can hurt rather than help you, especially if you are already fostering feelings of self-doubt.

Valerie Young is an expert on impostor syndrome who has built her career around studying and helping thousands of workers tackle it. Her doctoral research at the University of Massachusetts Amherst focused on observing and eliminating internal restrictions to success, with the majority of her subjects being women of color. While women of color face many systemic obstacles at work (which we should not ignore), Young's strategy aims to empower individuals by encouraging people to intentionally acknowledge their accomplishments and abilities.

In a sense, it can be compared with mindfulness. When we push ourselves to remain in the present, rather than posit about the future or worry about the past, we can focus more clearly on the reality of our situations and more easily let anxious thoughts go.

For example, say your boss has given you an assignment you feel you are not equipped to lead. Instead of ruminating about why your boss chose you or catastrophizing about all the things that could go wrong, stay present and acknowledge your reality: Your boss believes in you and trusts you to do good work.

Another tactic that I've found helpful is based on the advice of Tiwalola Ogunlesi, life coach and founder of Confident and Killing It, who recommends we acknowledge our achievements by completing a "monthly wins tracker" to chronicle our progress.

Essentially, you break a spreadsheet into two columns:

- Type of win (big or small)
- Descriptions (what actions you completed)

While you are completing the exercise, Ogunlesi emphasizes the importance of reflecting on questions that inspire you to discover your full powers. For instance, "What have I done that makes me feel capable?" or "If a younger me could see my life now, what would she be proud of?"

Ogunlesi's exercise was inspired by psychologist Martin Seligman's theory of well-being, which finds (among other things) that people feel more hopeful about the future when they look back on their life with a sense of achievement. "Impostor syndrome is just temporary memory loss, where you have forgotten all the amazing things about you," she says. "We can mitigate impostor syndrome by reflecting on and reminding ourselves of our strengths on a regular basis."

Celebrate Your Wins

We often get so focused on the outcomes of our work that we forget to take a pause and honor ourselves. We worry that it is a waste of time or it will make us seem like show-offs. But celebrating yourself is a simple, fun way to combat impostor syndrome.

Ogunlesi suggests thinking about the many ways you can share the lessons you've learned from your accomplishments. "By reframing self-promotion as an exchange of value and self-enthusiasm, you can inspire others while mitigating your internal fears," she says.

For illustration, if you write a post on LinkedIn celebrating your new job, mention what you learned during the hiring process. Did you discover your resiliency or the importance of soft skills? Whatever it was, don't keep it to yourself—you never know whom you'll influence.

"There is no point in being the world's best secret," Ogunlesi says. "You can have the best product or service, but nobody will know you exist if you do not put yourself out there." The more you showcase yourself, the more people will see you as a thought leader in your industry. While external validation can only go so far, seeing that others appreciate your brilliance can help you let go of the notion that you're a fraud.

Finally, some of us need to more *actively* celebrate to feel the full force of our successes. If this sounds like you, take yourself to dinner, text a friend about your accomplishment, or even buy yourself something small. Whatever you choose, do something! It doesn't have to be huge, but it should matter to you. When we recognize our wins (regardless of their size), our brains release the feel-good neurotransmitter dopamine, which motivates us to accomplish even more.

If you learn from your mistakes, it's OK to fail every now and then.

Use Social Media (Mindfully)

The internet can be very good and very evil when it comes to building up or breaking down feelings of impostor syndrome. We can now look into the lives of popular role models on social media platforms like LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. We can interact with, follow, and connect with people we never had access to before.

You can use these powerful tools to research people you admire and see what they're doing with their lives. Find out how they got to where they are today and learn from their success stories. Michelle Obama, for instance, is a powerhouse woman whom many people admire. But guess what? A quick Google search will bring you to a YouTube video in which she speaks about the feelings of impostor syndrome she experienced throughout her career. The risks she took regardless resulted in her success. While this is, admittedly, an exceptional example, Obama's story is a powerful reminder to never doubt your own potential.

Having said that, there is a caveat: I recommend that you be very intentional when choosing your role models online. You may find accessible people within your network whom you can connect with—people whom you can meet in person, build relationships with, and even turn to for advice. But on all social media platforms, there is a risk of following people (aka influencers leading perfectly staged lives) who might contribute to feelings of inadequacy and poor self-esteem.

To gain the benefits of the internet and surpass the downsides, practice self-awareness as you scroll through your feeds and score the search engines. Unfollow people who bring you down, and focus on the educational or inspirational content that feeds your best self, and that reminds you to express gratitude for your wins, give yourself grace, and visualize the future you want.

Make a Plan

This advice may seem obvious, but the idea here is to be strategic—not reactive. For instance, let's say you've tried the advice above and you still feel like a total impostor. What can you do? To avoid letting your nerves get the better of you, I would suggest coming up with an organized plan for success.

When you feel like a fraud, you may naturally panic. To prove yourself, you may produce a long list of goals and deadlines to hit without strategizing how you will reach them. As a result, you may end up entirely overwhelmed and unable to execute your objectives effectively. You set yourself up to fail before you even begin.

A better way to manage your anxious feelings is to get organized. Break down your goals into smaller, more manageable chunks and tackle them one at a time. While completing a vast number of tasks can feel overwhelming, being consistent will get you far.

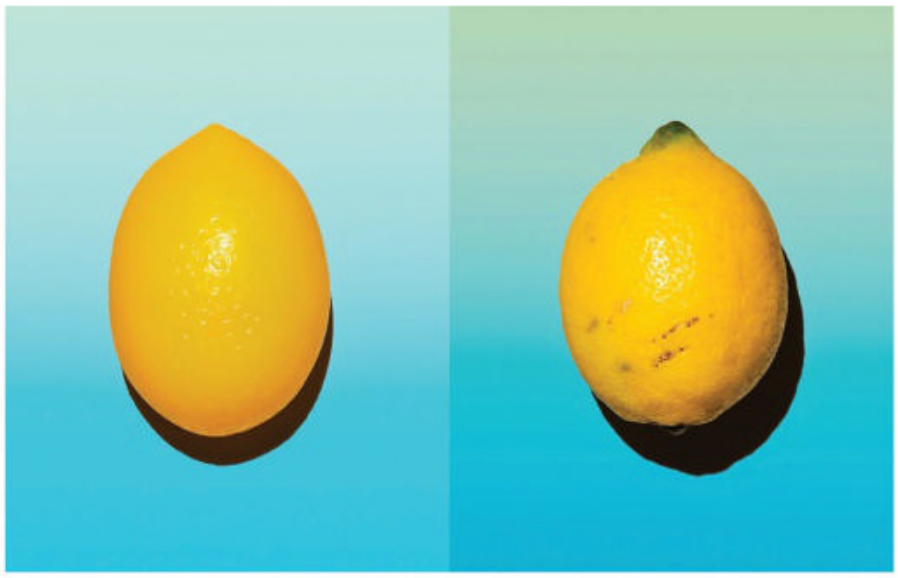
In his book *Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones* (Avery, 2018), author and speaker James Clear emphasizes the impact of "one percent better every day." Set aside time to work on your most important tasks of the week. Schedule a chunk of time for completing several smaller, lower-impact tasks (reading emails, scheduling, and so forth) and chunks of time for working exclusively on higher-impact projects (one by one). This way, you manage what you need to do in both the short and long term.

Lastly, you can protect your ego by reminding yourself that you will face obstacles. In fact, to avoid any soul-crushing setbacks or surprises, you should expect and prepare for them. Remember that even the most accomplished people have room for improvement. Making mistakes is inevitable. If you learn from those mistakes, it's OK to fail every now and then.

Part of the journey to overcoming impostor syndrome is learning from each experience you face. Not every piece of advice will work for everyone, so take notes along the way and reflect on what feels best to you in different situations. Adjust your plan on the basis of your newfound knowledge and keep adjusting. Impostor syndrome is a battle that with practice, you can and will win.

Originally published on HBR Ascend January 3, 2022

***Kess Eruteya** is the founder of InclusionZ, which assists top corporations in engaging diverse and youthful (Gen Z) audiences. She is also a keynote speaker specializing in innovation, diversity and inclusion, and corporate social responsibility.*



HBR STAFF/JORG GREUEL/GETTY IMAGES

2. Why It's OK to Be an Impostor

→ by AMANDA REILL

TWO YEARS AGO, I made a 180-degree career pivot from administrative work to entrepreneurship. I wanted to make a go at full-time content writing, so I jumped into the deep end. I spread a wide net (leaning heavily into my natural penchant for sales, no doubt) and landed more than 30 clients—from bloggers looking for ghostwriters to entrepreneurs who wanted YouTube scripts—in less than six months.

I felt fortunate to have kick-started my new career in such a powerful way, but with this success came the inevitable feeling that I was in over my head. Starting a new business venture was not like applying for a job. Now, I was the one determining whether I was qualified.

Only a few weeks earlier, I had been assisting with other people's projects, not managing my own. I had functioned in a supportive role, not leading and innovating. So, I choked my way through the first few calls with new clients, confessing that I was entering uncharted territory and really hadn't taken on a project like theirs. Some clients were good-humored about my being new to the industry. But for those who were high on professionalism and low on amusement, after the first few raised eyebrows, I quickly decided not to show my cards.

A cacophony of voices vied for space in my head, telling me I couldn't achieve what I was trying to do. We commonly call these voices "the inner critic" or "impostor syndrome." I walked away from the corner my critic had bullied me into and invited the critic to join me for coffee instead. Immediately, it raised objections: Did you just promise someone you would SEO-optimize their content? You don't know anything about that. Do you know how you'll deliver without enough knowledge on that subject?

Instead of cowering or avoiding, I considered every objection rationally. I spoke to myself as I would have to a friend attempting to solve a difficult problem.

I ASKED: *Do you know how to run a content writing business?*

I ANSWERED: *Technically, no. But I do know how to write and interact with people with kindness and professionalism.*

I ASKED: *Do you have the wherewithal to devise solutions to business problems?*

I ANSWERED: *Yes, I think I can handle that.*

My mildly reluctant "yes" was grounded in a concept called self-efficacy—the kryptonite to impostor syndrome. The concept of self-efficacy can be traced back to Albert Bandura, a professor and psychologist working in the late 1970s who explored the idea that an individual's positive belief in their own competence for a task positively impacts their performance. Studies have shown that students with high self-efficacy will attribute many of the failures they experience to a lack of attempt rather than a lack of ability. Meanwhile, students who doubt their abilities, giving way to impostor syndrome, are more likely to procrastinate or give up.

Once I discovered this, I began to practice self-efficacy regularly. This doesn't mean I pretended I was an expert at everything. It means I gave myself permission to be good at the things I already knew I excelled at, or at least had the potential to. I imagined what my future self—an established writer—would be like. How organized she would be. How confidently she would communicate. I built a proverbial house for my professional persona to live in and kept decorating the walls, even if there were no visitors yet.

When people asked me what was happening in my career, I crafted my responses more intentionally. I answered, "I'm a writer," instead of, "I'm trying to be a writer." When clients asked how I planned to confront a challenge, I decided, then and there, how I'd handle it—even if it was something I'd never faced before. "How do you normally collect insights?" someone once asked. I took a quick breath and responded, "We can do this in a number of ways." As time went on, I was able to adjust my spiel and recommend what I knew worked. In the meantime, I had to start somewhere.

I also indulged in more positive self-talk. When I noticed intrusive, self-doubting thoughts, I approached them from a place of curiosity. The default soundtrack in my mind used to wonder: What if the world doesn't need another writer? What if I'm just exhausting a saturated market? I made an adjustment: What if the opposite is true? What if someone has been waiting for what I'm trying to create?

Eventually, on the advice of trusted friends, I started an LLC (limited liability company). This helped me walk through the metaphorical front door as if I belonged there, in the realm of success.

While humility is valuable, anyone who has started a business understands that there are enough critics out there. We have to, at the very least, be on our own sides. Even so, and even with my current success, my inner critic still gets the best of me sometimes. When this figure shows up with their permanent scoff, I seek to understand what's brought them to my door and evaluate whether it's worth inviting them in. Sometimes they ask a really good question that helps me bulk up my skills. Sometimes they're just there to ruin my day.

I now see myself as a self-efficacious beginner wrapped in a journey that changes every day. I've accepted that it's OK to be an impostor along the way, as long as I can be my own friend and loudest cheerleader, too.

Originally published on HBR Ascend October 19, 2022

Amanda Reill *is an executive coach and the director of executive storytelling for Massive Alliance, a media technology company building executives into industry thought leaders. She is a regular contributor to* Entrepreneur *magazine,* Strixus *magazine, and other mainstream publications.*

RICHARD DRURY/GETTY IMAGES

3. How to Make Friends with Your Inner Impostor

→ by AMANTHA IMBER

ALMOST 20 YEARS ago, I received a phone call that changed my life: "Congratulations! You've been accepted into the Doctorate of Organizational Psychology program at Monash University."

There must have been an administrative error, I thought. Surely, I was too young, inexperienced, and unknowledgeable to be accepted. Or was I?

Turns out, it wasn't an error. I really did get in, and a little less than three years later, I went on to become the youngest graduate from the program. Today, I'm an organizational psychologist, and I run Inventium, a behavioral science consultancy that aims to help people perform better and be happier at work. I also host the podcast *How I Work,* where I interview CEOs, entrepreneurs, writers, and performers to unpack what has led them to success.

Through the many conversations I've had with people from all walks of life, I've learned that I'm not alone in my experience with impostor syndrome—the persistent, nagging thought that tells us we don't deserve our achievements. Scientific research has found that up to 82% of people experience impostor syndrome. The other 18% are probably too scared to admit it.

The next time you experience self-doubt, interpret the feelings as a motivating force.

The guests I've interviewed for my podcast back me up. No matter how competent or successful they are, I'm often shocked at how many of them, even when they become CEOs and land deals, continue to feel the same insecurities and fears I felt the day I got my Monash-acceptance phone call. But unlike many of us, they have figured out ways to channel their emotions into something productive. And that means we can do it, too.

Here are four things I've learned about how to use impostor syndrome as a force for good.

Interpret self-doubt as a positive emotion. When I interviewed *Broad City* creator, writer, and star Abbi Jacobson, my stomach was doing somersaults. I'd been a fan of Abbi's work for years and had seen every episode of her sitcom, which ran for five seasons on Comedy Central. At some point, I'd read that she had a severe case of impostor syndrome during the earlier seasons of her show, and I was curious whether she still experienced it.

In short, her answer was yes. Abbi described her experiences with speaking at events or being on panels and feeling entirely cloaked in self-doubt.

"*What am I doing here? Why does anyone care what I have to say about this topic?,* I'd think to myself. I get very nervous before performances or new things. Like I'm going to be exposed for not being good," she said.

But here's the thing. Unlike most of us who interpret nerves and self-doubt as a bad thing, for Abbi, it's positive.

"I'm happy that I still get very nervous, even if I maybe shouldn't be ... I want to always be looking at myself and questioning where I am in my career. I want to be measuring how far I've come and know that there's still so much farther to go. Even if I'm really confident in what I'm doing right now and the projects I'm working on, I still can be so much better."

Hearing Abbi's perspective made me interpret my feelings of impostor syndrome in a different light. What if I started to think of my nervousness as a positive thing? What if I reinterpreted it as an energy booster or proof of how much I care? Now I tell myself that I'm nervous not because I shouldn't be here, but because I'm excited to share whatever it is that I am about to say.

PRO TIP: *The next time you experience self-doubt, interpret the feelings as a motivating force. Think of your nerves as reminders that there will always be room to grow. Instead of shying away from experiences that trigger your doubt, deliberately embrace them and remember that it's only through challenges that we can improve.*

Stop trying to be the smartest person in the room. Cyan Ta'eed spent many years feeling like she wasn't as intelligent, as capable, and as good as everyone thought she was. This was despite the fact that she had cofounded Envato, a Melbourne-based technology firm worth more than $1 billion.

To overcome her impostor syndrome, Cyan looked for role models—people who oozed an effortless confidence. She deliberately sought these people out, spoke to them, and closely observed what they did differently than herself when faced with doubt. One of the qualities they had in common is that they never seemed to worry about asking questions that might make them look stupid. "And I always worried about that," Cyan confessed.

"I needed to shift my thinking from wanting to *seem* like the smartest person in the room to wanting to leave the room *being* the smartest person. And it meant that I needed to ask questions constantly. I needed to not care whether it made me look like an idiot."

I could relate. Many times in my own career I have shied away from asking questions for fear of being judged. But shortly after we spoke, I began a new practice: simply asking others what is truly on my mind. In meetings now, when I see people nodding in agreement or smiling, I'm reassured that my instincts were right—and asking not only helps me grow but also helps the people who are still too nervous to raise their hand and speak out.

PRO TIP: *Instead of obsessing about how others will view you, try to remove your self-censorship. It will only get in the way of your learning. And chances are, other people in that room you're trying so hard to impress probably want to ask the same question. Remember, you're doing everyone else a favor by asking whatever you are unclear on or want more information about. Ironically, you'll probably appear more confident in your abilities and competency because you had the courage to ask what you didn't know.*

The most successful people in the world embrace self-doubt and are not afraid to look stupid.

Don't shy away from failure, even if it scares you. Cyan also found that her impostor syndrome often caused her to shy away from opportunities that seemed intimidating. "For a long time, all I was doing was avoiding failing," she says. "But then I realized that I needed to start saying yes to opportunities, even when they were scary."

She realized that by saying yes, she was increasing the risk of potential failure but at the same time dramatically improving her personal rate of growth. After all, it's hard to grow from opportunities that are easy or safe.

With practice, Cyan forced herself to get comfortable failing, and coping with that failure, on both large and small scales. "When you try to do really hard things that someone's never done before, oftentimes you fail. I've launched about 10 start-ups. There's a lot you haven't heard about and don't know about because [those start-ups] didn't succeed, and I closed them down."

When speaking on panels where she didn't know the answer to a question, instead of pretending, she would simply admit that she didn't know. Listening to Cyan, I realized that becoming comfortable with the idea of failure and not knowing all the answers is OK. Weighing opportunities became less about running away from self-doubt and more about embracing new challenges.

PRO TIP: *When reviewing opportunities to throw yourself into, ask yourself why you're afraid of them. Are you hesitating to take something on because you are worried about failure? If the answer is yes, it's probably a good sign that you should say yes because it will be a great growth opportunity. Just be careful to not overload yourself—prioritize experiences that will stretch you the furthest and help you get closer to your goals.*

Don't run away from negative feedback. Embrace it. If you saw Dom Price speak at a conference, you would assume he's the most confident person in the room. He is very tall, has a booming voice, and leads research and development for Atlassian, one of the biggest technology companies on the planet. Yet Dom says that he experiences impostor syndrome every single day. And for him, it's a massive motivator to listen deeply to feedback.

"It's ironic that a lot of people see impostor syndrome as a reason to stop listening to negativity. I actually seek it out," Dom says. "I got some feedback this morning from an event I spoke at in the U.S. recently. I ignored all the praise and went straight to the criticism, because I wanted to know what people hated about it. I can't learn much from [praise]. But I can learn a lot from [critical feedback].

"The minute I shut down and stop listening or get so arrogant and caught up in my own story that I don't actually take others into account, that's when all the wheels fall off," he adds.

It's taken some time, but I, too, have learned to embrace critical feedback. I try to avoid taking it personally (it's rarely intended to be) and instead see each piece of constructive feedback as a strategy I can implement to improve my own performance. If someone is taking the time to give me critical feedback, it means they believe I can improve, and that's a good sign.

PRO TIP: *Start to become aware of when you shut down in the face of negative feedback. Remind yourself that only negative feedback—not positive–can help you figure out how to grow and improve. It can also be useful to assume positive intent from the feedback giver: They are giving you feedback because they want to see you get better and they believe you can do it. After receiving the feedback, take some time to plan out how you will apply it—you might even do this in conjunction with the person who gave it to you.*

The big idea? Make friends with your impostor syndrome and stop seeing it as a weakness. The most successful people in the world embrace self-doubt and are not afraid to look stupid. And if you're avoiding doing something because it makes you nervous, remind yourself that these experiences are the richest ones for helping you learn.

Originally published on HBR Ascend May 17, 2021

***Amantha Imber** is the author of* Time Wise *(Penguin Life, 2022), founder of the behavioral science consultancy Inventium, and host of* How I Work, *a podcast about the habits and rituals of the world's most successful people.*

JONATHAN KIRN/GETTY IMAGES

4. Choose Courage over Confidence

→ by CHRISTIE HUNTER ARSCOTT

HAVE YOU EVER shied away from taking on a role or opportunity because you didn't feel confident enough? Perhaps your inner critic told you that you weren't ready or capable enough, or that you didn't have enough experience. Perhaps the voice in your head asked: Why me?

If you can relate, you're among the majority of women with whom I've worked. I recently asked more than 120 women from areas including the U.S., the UK, Australia, Georgia, Italy, India, Jamaica, and Bermuda: "If you've ever avoided risks, what factors and reasons contributed to this?" More than 70% reported that self-doubt—not having enough belief in themselves, their capabilities, or their skills—was a driving factor.

As one high-profile executive says: "Every day I doubt myself. I doubt that I am good enough to be where I am."

This shouldn't come as a surprise. We know self-doubt is a pervasive and often paralyzing concern, particularly for women. A study by psychologists at Cornell and Washington State universities highlighted higher levels of self-doubt in women. Research has also shown that women will apply for a job only if they meet all the qualifications, whereas men will apply when they fulfill only 60%. Another recent study identified a substantial gender gap when it comes to self-promotion, with women systematically providing less favorable assessments of their own past performance and potential future ability. Ultimately, men take more chances on themselves, and that pays dividends in the long run.

Focus on Courage, Not Confidence

While this pattern of self-doubt emerged again and again in studies, my interactions, and my client work, I also noticed another commonality: These women's self-doubts weren't sabotaging their success. The vast majority of successful women leaders I've interviewed and coached have built vibrant and fulfilling careers despite facing self-doubt.

What these women also had in common is courage in the absence of confidence—a trait that is often weaponized against women and used to explain why they fail to achieve career goals. My work has found that successful women take decisive action to move forward even while grappling with fears and doubts and questioning their own "readiness."

"As women, we often feel like we have to be 100% ready in order to move forward. But, if you are 50% or 75% there, jump. Just do it," says Megan Costello, former executive director of the Mayor's Office for Women's Advancement, in Boston.

An added bonus? Confidence is the by-product of courage. The executives I've spoken with shared that with each challenge accepted and conquered, they gained confidence. "Gaining more responsibility has given me reason to believe in myself. Now, I'm the president of a brand," says Julie Hauser-Blanner, former president of Brioche Dorée, a Canadian bakery chain.

By refocusing our internal narratives on courage instead of confidence, women can take bold actions in the face of self-doubt and fear. Here are three strategies to get you started.

Don't underestimate the impact of small yet significant acts of courage. Micro acts of courage—seemingly small-scale acts that have incremental impacts over time and long-term returns—are

key to unlocking a courageous mindset. As Su-Mei Thompson, CEO of Media Trust, shares: "It is not just about taking a few big risks but about pushing yourself each day to get outside your comfort zone."

Early in her career at Unilever, Leena Nair often found herself in rooms with few other women, where it felt intimidating to speak up. She came up with a method to encourage her own micro acts of courage. "I used to have a little book in which every time I spoke up, I would draw a star," she told me during our discussion at the Global Unilever Headquarters, in London. "If I opened my mouth five times, then I would draw five stars. If I made a point that really resonated, I gave myself double stars. By doing this, I kept myself accountable." These micro acts led to long-term rewards—Nair rose to become the first female, first Asian, and youngest-ever CHRO of Unilever and then went on to become the CEO of Chanel.

Courage begets courage. It's a muscle that gets stronger every time you use it, no matter how small the act.

Practice courageous acts in all areas of your life. Nervous to start in your working environment? Start with courageous acts outside work. Courage is a transferable mindset that then permeates all aspects of your life.

One woman I worked with made a goal of going out to dinner or lunch or on a date with someone new every week so that she could expand her friendships and dating prospects in a new city while becoming more connected. Others went out of their comfort zone and joined a gym or fitness class they previously would have shied away from. Others started saying no more often and protecting time for themselves rather than trying to please others.

DEI executive Karen Brown shares that she pushes herself outside of her comfort zone in her personal life by "constantly stretching myself to learn, especially that which is unfamiliar to me. This could range from traveling to countries with cultures that are completely opposite of what I'm accustomed to, attending an event, or listening to and/or reading content outside my area of expertise."

Try again tomorrow. A strategy used by Elizabeth O'Day, who founded Olaris, a precision diagnostics company working to change how diseases are treated, is to continue to make a daily commitment to going beyond her comfort zone, even when met with resistance. Now in her thirties, O'Day serves as the company's CEO, cochairs the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Biotechnology, and is a member of *Scientific American*'s steering committee for the publication's "Top 10 Emerging Technologies." However, her impressive résumé doesn't tell the full story of the challenges she has overcome.

"Every day as a young female scientist CEO in biotech, there are challenges, and it takes a lot of courage to face these challenges," she says. When her company was in the start-up phase, O'Day often faced investors who would ask "ridiculous or sometimes insulting" questions, and even challenge her expertise and achievements. "Every time that I was asked to derive mathematical equations or list a dozen metabolic pathways and their links to disease, I would do it without error. Yet, rarely did it translate into the investment that I was seeing male counterparts with far less data or degrees receive." O'Day's experience tracks with the numerous studies showing that women receive more scrutiny, including doubt-generating statements, than their male counterparts.

Does O'Day always feel confident? No. As she shares, "I often remember the quote by Mary Anne Radmacher, 'Courage does not always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, I will try again tomorrow.'"

AS ANAÏS NIN, a twentieth-century French-Cuban-American diarist and writer, said: "Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage." Your career is no different. It's time to refocus your efforts from seeking an elusive feeling of confidence to taking decisive action with courage.

Originally published on HBR.org December 8, 2022

***Christie Hunter Arscott** is an award-winning adviser, speaker, and author of* Begin Boldly: How Women Can Reimagine Risk, Embrace Uncertainty, and Launch a Brilliant Career *(Berrett-Koehler, 2022). A Rhodes Scholar, she has been named by Thinkers50 as one of the top management thinkers likely to shape the future of business.*

MALCOLM AINSWORTH/GETTY IMAGES

5. Everyone Suffers from Impostor Syndrome—Here's How to Handle It

→ by ANDY MOLINSKY

ONE OF THE greatest barriers to moving outside your comfort zone is the fear that you're a poser, you're not worthy, and you couldn't possibly be qualified to do whatever you're aiming to do. It's a fear that strikes many of us: impostor syndrome.

I know I've certainly had those thoughts while publishing pieces of writing, whether they are blogs or books. I've had them while teaching my first university classes and giving speeches to corporate audiences. I appear confident on the outside but feel deeply insecure on the inside, wondering who I am to be stepping up to this stage. What could I possibly have to say that anyone would want to hear?

And I'm not alone. Actress (and Harvard alum) Natalie Portman described the self-doubt she experienced as a Harvard student in a poignant commencement speech several years ago. "I felt like there had been some mistake," she said, "that I wasn't smart enough to be in this company, and that every time I opened my mouth, I would have to prove that I wasn't just a dumb actress." Howard Schultz, the chair, president, and CEO of Starbucks, revealed that he and CEOs he knows feel the same way: "Very few people, whether you've been in that job before or not, get into the seat and believe today that they are now qualified to be the CEO. They're not going to tell you that, but it's true."

What can you do to overcome these feelings of inadequacy?

Recognize the benefits of being a novice. Portman highlighted this in her Harvard address: You might not realize it, but there are great benefits to being new in your field. When you are not steeped in the conventional wisdom of a given profession, you can ask questions that haven't been asked before or approach problems in ways others haven't thought of.

It's no surprise, for example, that some of the best research ideas I get as a professor come from undergraduate students with little previous experience, people who can think with an outsider's fresh perspective. This is true in business as well. The pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly has created a crowdsourcing platform called InnoCentive, through which outside innovators are paid to solve vexing problems the company faces. And it works! In fact, according to a study by Karim Lakhani of Harvard Business School, many problems are solved by those from outside the field in question—physicists solving chemistry problems, for example. So the next time you feel inadequate in a particular domain, remember that as an outsider to the role in question, you might have the most critical perspective of all.

Focus more on what you're learning than on how you're performing. According to psychologist Carol Dweck, you might

actually be able to control the feelings that impostor syndrome leaves you with. With a performance mindset, which people suffering from impostor syndrome often have, you tend to see your feelings of inadequacy or the mistakes you make as evidence of your underlying limitations. This mindset only fuels the concerns you have about being unfit for your job. There's something you can work to cultivate instead: a learning mindset. From this perspective, you experience your limitations quite differently. You see your mistakes as an inevitable part of the learning process rather than as more evidence of your underlying failings.

Understand the power of perspective. Those of us who experience impostor syndrome often feel like we're the only ones feeling this way, but the reality is very different. Early in my career, when I walked into a networking event, I was convinced that I was the only one worried about making small talk with strangers. But over time I've realized that practically everyone in the room shares that same concern. According to a recent survey by Vantage Hill Partners, being found incompetent is the number one fear of executives worldwide. So if you feel like an impostor, chances are that others in your situation feel the exact same way. Or, as Tina Fey once quipped, "I've realized that almost everyone is a fraud, so I try not to feel too bad about it."

It may not be easy, but overcoming impostor syndrome is possible—you don't need to feel helpless or alone. The next time you feel completely outside your comfort zone, don't focus on your failures. Consider it an opportunity to learn from your missteps and to bring forth a new perspective that others may not have.

Originally published on HBR.org July 7, 2016

***Andy Molinsky** is a professor of organizational behavior and international management at Brandeis University and the author of* Global Dexterity: How to Adapt Your Behavior Across Cultures Without Losing Yourself in the Process *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2013) and* Reach: A New Strategy to Help You Step Outside Your Comfort Zone, Rise to the Occasion, and Build Confidence *(Avery, 2017). His work helps people step outside their personal and cultural comfort zones.*

MATT ANDERSON PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

6. The One Skill That Helped Me Grow in My Career

→ by TAPAN SINGHEL

YOU'VE BAGGED TWO job offers. They have roughly equivalent salaries and benefits. The first one is that of a marketing assistant. You've had this job before, and you have the requisite skills to do it well. The second is a similar position but comes with the additional responsibilities of managing a few social media channels, which you know less about. You'll need to invest time and energy into learning something you may not be comfortable with and push yourself out of your comfort zone.

Which one do you pick? Your choice will depend on your mindset.

In her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Random House, 2006), author Carol Dweck identifies two ways of thinking: We have either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. People with a fixed mindset believe that they are born with certain abilities and that those abilities determine what they

A growth mindset shines through when you're able to replace the word "failing" with "learning."

can achieve. People with a growth mindset, on the other hand, believe that their abilities can be built and developed over time. They often set higher expectations for themselves—even when faced with challenges, mistakes, and failures.

To thrive as a new employee, especially today, you really need to have a growth mindset, and if you already have one, you need to keep developing it. Your success in the workforce will depend on how willing you are to keep an open mind, stay curious, develop new skills, and approach difficult tasks.

So let me ask again: Knowing this, would you choose the first offer (and keep a fixed mindset)? Or would you choose the second offer (and push yourself to grow)?

The transition from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset isn't easy. It happens over a period of time and is largely determined by your ability to learn from both your successes and your failures.

How can you start? Here are a few tips that have worked for me throughout my life and career.

Don't blame circumstances. Acknowledge and embrace your mistakes. For my undergraduate degree, I studied science and majored in physics. One semester, I failed in a few subjects. It was a mistake, and it was embarrassing. Initially, I didn't handle it so well. I blamed my grades on everything else but me. This often happens when you have a fixed mindset. You criticize the circumstances ("My teacher was terrible") or become defensive and self-deprecating ("I'm just not cut out to do this kind of work").

It took me time to realize that by reacting that way, I was ultimately disempowering myself. When you blame others for your own failures, you deny yourself the chance to fix them. I began, instead, to use my failures for introspection.

I wrote down the obstacles that had kept me from getting the grades I wanted:

- I didn't study enough during the semester.
- I didn't prioritize my studies over my social life.
- I didn't make an effort to understand the subjects that challenged me.

After much deliberation, I realized that I had failed not because I was intellectually less capable, but because I had been distracted and my focus had wavered. I asked myself: Knowing this, how can I concentrate on the right things? How can I strengthen my understanding of these subjects? How can I remedy the situation and change the impact of failure?

First, I changed the narrative I was telling myself: I wasn't incapable. I didn't fail. I just learned what not to do. That in itself gave way to the bigger picture. I reprioritized my life and scheduled focused periods of time to study the concepts I found most challenging. I was not shy about reaching out to my peers and professors for help when I had doubts. I practiced and revised. Slowly, I began to value learning over getting good grades, and I made it through my program.

The next time you fail, don't make the same mistake I did. Use the experience to learn about yourself and craft a better approach for achieving your goal.

When faced with the unfamiliar, don't run or hide. I started my career as a divisional accountant at a public-sector insurance company. I had great bosses who were invested in my development. Over time, I was asked to fill in as the lead for the legal, information technology, and accounts departments. My bosses entrusted me with tasks I had no prior experience in.

Did I jump at the opportunities and face them head-on? No! Not at first. I'll admit, I deliberated for a couple of days. Then I asked myself, How many people get this kind of an opportunity at this point in their career?

When I weighed my options, I realized that my chance of failing was zero if I didn't try at all, as was my chance of succeeding and moving up in the organization. I asked myself, If I do fail, what's the worst that could happen? I turned back to the narrative that got me through college: It would not mean I was incapable. It would teach me what not to do.

That seemed like a learning opportunity.

I mustered up the courage to dive into the unknown. Instead of evaluating the situation through a negative lens ("I might fail," "I will look silly," "People will think I'm a loser"), I shifted my outlook ("How will I succeed?" "What do I need to make smart decisions?" "How can I come out a winner?").

The fact that my manager had faith in me was my biggest motivator. I saw the larger purpose of how this would prepare me for bigger roles down the line. Even though I didn't have all the skills, I was confident that if

I put my heart to it, I could learn them.

A growth mindset shines through when you're able to replace the word "failing" with "learning."

Don't be hesitant about asking for help. After I took on the leadership role for the accounts department, the junior accounts clerk, who performed routine data-entry tasks like invoices and billing, suddenly became ill. We couldn't find a replacement for him in time and the month end was drawing closer, which meant books had to be tallied and accounts needed to be closed.

If I approached this situation with a fixed mindset, I would've been stuck. Instead I said to myself, This is going to take patience and hard work, but I'm going to figure it out.

I spent time with experts in the department learning the basics and asking questions, however simple they seemed. I learned what a ledger is. I learned what debit and credit means. I learned how to prepare a balance sheet. We closed and submitted the accounts on time, but more important, I expanded my abilities and gained a deeper understanding of the work my team was doing day-to-day.

When you are just starting out, everything will seem new. No one comes with all the expertise. But the best way through an unknown situation is going through it rather than avoiding it or feeling let down by it. That being said, having a growth mindset doesn't mean that you can do anything. It means you are comfortable acknowledging that all of us are capable of growth and improvement.

So don't give up on an opportunity because you feel you don't have the skills to succeed at it. You can learn those skills. If you've been avoiding working on that project report because it requires a lot of analysis, pick it up and get started. If you've been missing networking events because you feel you're not good at small talk, attend one. The first few might be uncomfortable, but over time, you'll get better at it. As Henry Ford put it, "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't—you're right."

Originally published on HBR Ascend February 26, 2021

***Tapan Singhel** is the managing director and CEO of Bajaj Allianz General Insurance. He also chairs the CII National Committee on Insurance and Pensions.*

PESKYMONKEY/GETTY IMAGES

7. Confidence Doesn't Always Boost Performance

→ by GARDINER MORSE

DON MOORE OF Berkeley's Haas School of Business and his colleagues gave a math test to a group of volunteers after manipulating their confidence. Half were told that the results of their intake surveys predicted that they would get most answers right; the other half were told that they'd bomb the test. Going in, members of the first group were optimistic about how they would perform, while those in the second group had real doubts. Their expectations matched those of observers

If you fake confidence, you may fail to prepare your organization—or your nation—for an impending risk and then manage it badly when it does hit.

who were asked to guess which subjects would do better. But the two groups of test takers scored nearly the same. The conclusion: Confidence doesn't always boost performance.

Professor Moore, defend your research.

MOORE: When Elizabeth Tenney, Jennifer Logg, and I did this experiment, we expected to find that being confident would enhance performance. That made intuitive sense to us. But we simply failed to see that result. People who were told that they would perform well and felt positively about how they'd do fared no better than those who were told that they would get most of the answers wrong and were worried about it. So we figured maybe a math test wasn't the best measure. Maybe we'd see different effects with different types of tests.

HBR: Let me guess...
We tried encouraging people—making them think they would do well—on a range of things: endurance and athletic challenges, trivia quizzes, boring persistence tasks, and even "Where's Waldo?" puzzles. There was no arena in which we found an effect on performance.

But wait. Are you saying that "You've got this! You can do it!" pep talks are a waste of time?
We didn't specifically study pep talks. What I can say is that telling people they're going to nail it isn't necessarily going to make them do better. In fact, if a "You're awesome!" kind of speech convinces an individual or a team that they can do better than they actually can, it can impair their performance—because they're overconfident and think they don't have to try as hard. My students who are the most sure that they're going to ace an exam and therefore don't study aren't the ones who get the best grades. Having accurate beliefs about your likelihood of success and what it's going to take to achieve it is the best mindset for any task.

So justifiable confidence is OK—and possibly can boost your performance?
Yes! Justifiable confidence not only is OK but is essential. If you will probably win the contest, it would be a mistake to stay out of it. If the new product will probably be a success, it would be a mistake not to introduce it. If you would hit it off with that attractive stranger, it would be a mistake not to introduce yourself to him or her. In these contexts, as in many others, justifiable confidence is an essential ingredient for wise decision-making.

So we shouldn't try to project a confidence that we don't actually have? Even when we're the boss?
I'm going to question your assumption that bosses or other businesspeople should do that. Imagine that an entrepreneur is pitching a venture capitalist. Is it really useful for the entrepreneur to delude themselves and the venture capitalist about the potential of their business? That creates problems when they overpromise and fail to deliver. Entrepreneurs can be honest and successful. Jeff Bezos estimated that there was a 70% chance that Amazon would fail. He told his parents, who were among his earliest investors, not to give him any money they could not afford to lose.

Aside from the risk of underperforming expectations, what's the harm in a little false confidence? Don't a lot of people get ahead by faking it until they make it?
I have done research showing that displays of confidence increase influence and social status. Obviously, you can fool some of the people some of the time with false bravado. But it is a fragile leadership strategy. Even if you reconcile yourself to the implicit hypocrisy, you have to worry about being unmasked. And if you fake confidence, you may fail to prepare your organization—or your nation—for an impending risk and then manage it badly when it does hit. This highlights the need for us as employees or investors or voters to be wary of poseurs and con men. We should require our would-be leaders to provide evidence of their capabilities and invite them to bet on the claims about which they're so confident.

Does that mean that in a meeting a manager is supposed to say something like "I'm 80% sure we'll see $10 million in sales in the first year?"
Exactly. What does each team member forecast for first-year sales? Have them commit to the chance that sales will surpass or fall short of some number and then publicize their bet. When there's a reputational stake associated with these types of forecasts, everyone tends to be a little more circumspect and realistic, which leads to better predictions.

How else can people bring their confidence in line with reality?
Use the most general-purpose debiasing strategy that psychologists have identified: Do a reality check by asking yourself why you might be wrong, because knowing where your perception might diverge from the truth helps you accurately calibrate your confidence. Explicitly consider the other side. How might you be making a mistake? What would your greatest critics say about your plan or belief? Inviting a trusted adviser to play devil's advocate is also a good idea. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, John F. Kennedy implemented many such checks within the executive branch, including beefing up the daily intelligence briefings he got so that they would challenge his assumptions—an approach that seems to be out of favor in the current administration.

In my own organization, when we make decisions about tenure, we explicitly appoint a faculty member to highlight a candidate's weaknesses and argue for why the person shouldn't get tenure. Some courageous leaders will ask a trusted confidant with standing within their organization to question what the boss is saying and take the contrary position in discussions of important initiatives. Another strategy is to have people weigh in with their opinions and predictions before the leader speaks. If you don't know what the boss is going to say, you're more likely to offer an honest point of view that might be contrary to his or her perspective.

In your book *Perfectly Confident*, you admit that your mother thinks you're a "Debbie Downer" about optimism. How do you respond to that?
My position is that people should believe the truth and align their beliefs with reality. That's the only approach that I can recommend in good conscience. Sometimes that means bringing delusions of grandeur down to earth and earning your confidence by doing the work needed to become the type of performer you'd like to be. But for anyone suffering from underconfidence, it actually means increasing your confidence so that it more accurately reflects your potential. When you should be confident but aren't, it can lead to missed opportunities—ventures you failed to start, jobs you failed to apply for, relationships you failed to initiate because you underestimated your chances of success. That's as big a mistake as thinking you're better than you really are.

Originally published in
Harvard Business Review
November–December 2020

HBR Reprint F2006B

***Gardiner Morse** is a former senior editor at* Harvard Business Review.

FOR YOU, OUR PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE IS NEVER-ENDING.

BEST PRIVATE BANK
U.S.

BEST PRIVATE BANK
FOR FAMILY OFFICES — GLOBAL

BEST PRIVATE BANK
FOR INNOVATION — GLOBAL

FT FINANCIAL TIMES | Financial Times Group, 2022

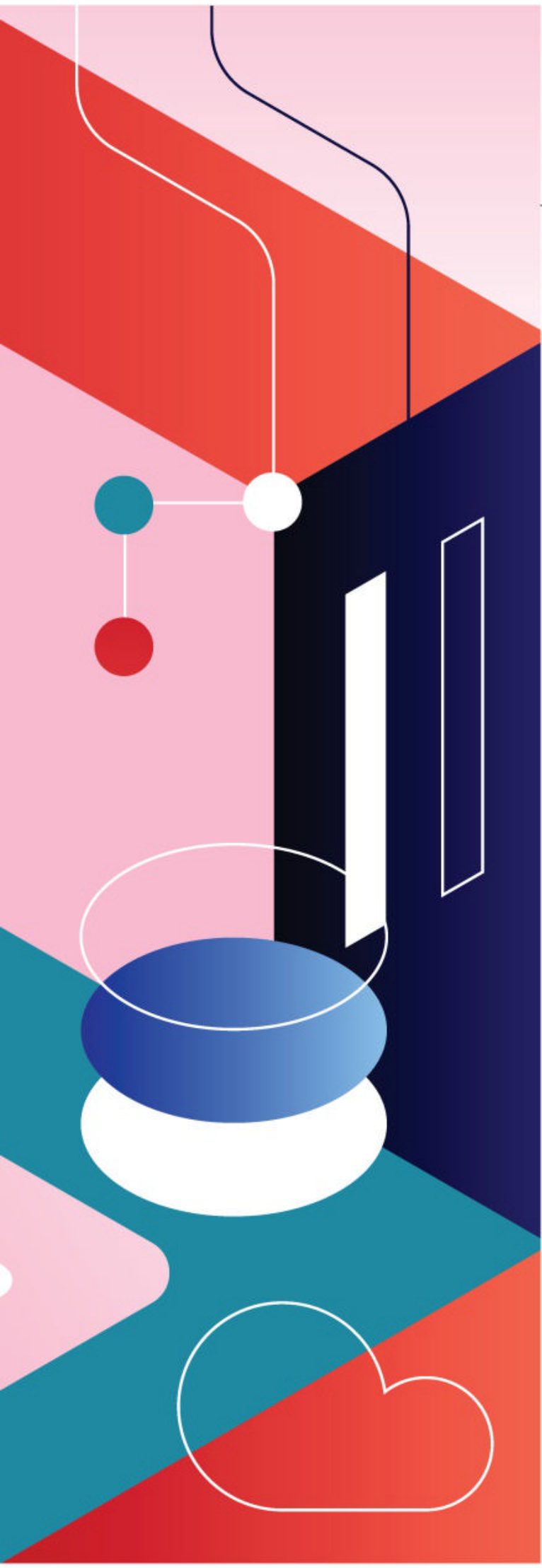
Advice that builds on success. Service and technology that never stop getting better. Every day we pursue excellence with intent and purpose to be our clients' most trusted advisor.

Let us help you realize the full potential of your wealth, contact Steven L. Fradkin, President, Wealth Management at 866-803-5857 or visit **northerntrust.com/best**

NORTHERN TRUST

Member FDIC. © 2023 Northern Trust Corporation.

INVESTING | BANKING | TRUST & ESTATE SERVICES | WEALTH PLANNING | FAMILY OFFICE



ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 2007

Becoming the Boss

The earliest test of leadership comes with that first assignment to manage others. Most new managers initially fail this test because of a set of common misconceptions about what it means to be in charge.

→ by LINDA A. HILL

EVEN FOR THE MOST GIFTED individuals, the process of becoming a leader is an arduous, albeit rewarding, journey of continuous learning and self-development. The initial test along the path is so fundamental that we often overlook it: becoming a boss for the first time. That's a shame, because the trials involved in this rite of passage have serious consequences for both the individual and the organization.

Executives are shaped irrevocably by their first management positions. Decades later, they recall those first months as transformational experiences that forged their leadership philosophies and styles in ways that may continue to haunt and hobble them throughout their careers. Organizations suffer considerable human and financial costs when a person who has been promoted because of strong individual

Illustration by **KOIVO**

performance and qualifications fails to adjust successfully to management responsibilities.

The failures aren't surprising, given the difficulty of the transition. Ask any new manager about the early days of being a boss—indeed, ask any senior executive to recall how he or she felt as a new manager. If you get an honest answer, you'll hear a tale of disorientation and, for some, overwhelming confusion. The new role didn't feel anything like it was supposed to. It felt too big for any one person to handle. And whatever its scope, it sure didn't seem to have anything to do with leadership.

In the words of one new branch manager at a securities firm: "Do you know how hard it is to be the boss when you are so out of control? It's hard to verbalize. It's the feeling you get when you have a child. On day X minus 1, you still don't have a child. On day X, all of a sudden you're a mother or a father and you're supposed to know everything there is to know about taking care of a kid."

Given the significance and difficulty of this first leadership test, it's surprising how little attention has been paid to the experiences of new managers and the challenges they face. The shelves are lined with books describing effective and successful leaders. But very few address the challenges of learning to lead, especially for the first-time manager.

For the past 15 years or so, I've studied people making major career transitions to management, focusing in particular on the star performer who is promoted to manager. My original ambition was to provide a forum for new managers to speak in their own words about what it means to learn to manage. I initially followed 19 new managers over the course of their first year in an effort to get a rare glimpse into their subjective experience: What did they find most difficult? What did they need to learn? How did they go about learning it? What resources did they rely upon to ease the transition and master their new assignments?

Since my original research, which I described in the first edition of *Becoming a Manager,* published in 1992, I've continued to study the personal transformation involved when someone becomes a boss. I've written case studies about new managers in a variety of functions and industries and have designed and led new-manager leadership programs for companies and not-for-profit organizations. As firms have become leaner and more dynamic—with different units working together to offer integrated products and services and with companies working with suppliers, customers, and competitors in an array of strategic alliances—new managers have described a transition that gets harder all the time.

Let me emphasize that the struggles these new managers face represent the norm, not the exception. These aren't impaired managers operating in dysfunctional organizations. They're ordinary people facing ordinary adjustment problems. The vast majority of them survive the transition and learn to function in their new role. But imagine how much more effective they would be if the transition were less traumatic.

To help new managers pass this first leadership test, we need to help them understand the essential nature of their role—what it truly means to be in charge. Most see themselves as managers and leaders; they use the rhetoric of leadership; they certainly feel the burdens of leadership. But they just don't get it.

Why Learning to Manage Is So Hard

One of the first things new managers discover is that their role, by definition a stretch assignment, is even more demanding than they'd anticipated. They are surprised to learn that the skills and methods required for success as an individual contributor and those required for success as a manager are starkly different—and that there is a gap between their current capabilities and the requirements of the new position.

In their prior jobs, success depended primarily on their personal expertise and actions. As managers, they are responsible for setting and implementing an agenda for a whole group, something for which their careers as individual performers haven't prepared them.

Take the case of Michael Jones, the new securities-firm branch manager I just mentioned. (The identities of individuals cited in this article have been disguised.) Michael had been a broker for 13 years and was a stellar producer, one of the most aggressive and innovative professionals in his region. At his company, new branch managers were generally promoted from the ranks on the basis of individual competence and achievements, so no one was surprised when the regional director asked him to consider a management career. Michael was confident he understood

As one disillusioned new leader puts it, "Becoming a manager is not about becoming a boss. It's about becoming a hostage."

what it took to be an effective manager. In fact, on numerous occasions he had commented that if he had been in charge, he would have been willing and able to fix things and make life better in the branch. After a month in his new role, however, he was feeling moments of intense panic; it was harder than he had imagined to get his ideas implemented. He realized he had given up his "security blanket" and there was no turning back.

Michael's reaction, although a shock to him, isn't unusual. Learning to lead is a process of learning by doing. It can't be taught in a classroom. It is a craft primarily acquired through on-the-job experiences—especially adverse experiences in which the new manager, working beyond his current capabilities, proceeds by trial and error. Most star individual performers haven't made many mistakes, so this is new for them. Furthermore, few managers are aware, in the stressful, mistake-making moments, that they are learning. The learning occurs incrementally and gradually.

As this process slowly progresses—as the new manager unlearns a mind-set and habits that have served him over a highly successful early career—a new professional identity emerges. He internalizes new ways of thinking and being and discovers new ways of measuring success and deriving satisfaction from work. Not surprisingly, this kind of psychological adjustment is taxing. As one new manager notes, "I never knew a promotion could be so painful."

Painful—and stressful. New managers inevitably ponder two questions: "Will I like management?" and "Will I be good at management?" Of course, there are no immediate answers; they come only with experience. And these two questions are often accompanied by an even more unsettling one: "Who am I becoming?"

A New Manager's Misconceptions

Becoming a boss is difficult, but I don't want to paint an unrelentingly bleak picture. What I have found in my research is that the transition is often harder than it need be because of new managers' misconceptions about their role. Their ideas about what it means to be a manager hold some truth. But, because these notions are simplistic and incomplete, they create false expectations that individuals struggle to reconcile with the reality of managerial life. By acknowledging the following misconceptions—some of which rise almost to the level of myth in their near-universal acceptance—new managers have a far greater chance of success. (For a comparison of the misconceptions and the reality, see the exhibit "Why New Managers Don't Get It.")

Managers wield significant authority. When asked to describe their role, new managers typically focus on the rights and privileges that come with being the boss. They assume the position will give them more authority and, with that, more freedom and autonomy to do what they think is best for the organization. No longer, in the words of one, will they be "burdened by the unreasonable demands of others."

New managers nursing this assumption face a rude awakening. Instead of gaining new authority, those I have

Idea in Brief

Ask new managers about their early days as bosses, and you'll hear tales of disorientation, even despair. As Hill points out, most novice bosses don't realize how sharply management differs from individual work. Hampered by misconceptions, they fail the trials involved in this rite of passage. And when they stumble, they jeopardize their careers and inflict staggering costs on their organizations.

How to avoid this scenario? Beware of common misconceptions about management: For example, subordinates don't necessarily obey your orders, despite your formal authority over them. You won't have more freedom to make things happen—instead, you'll feel constrained by organizational interdependencies. And you're responsible not only for maintaining your own operations—but also for initiating positive changes both inside and outside your areas of responsibility.

Armed with *realistic* expectations, you'll be more likely to survive the transition to management—and generate valuable results for your organization.

Why New Managers Don't Get It

Beginning managers often fail in their new role, at least initially, because they come to it with misconceptions or myths about what it means to be a boss. These myths, because they are simplistic and incomplete, lead new managers to neglect key leadership responsibilities.

	MYTH	REALITY
Defining characteristic of the new role:	**Authority** "Now I will have the freedom to implement my ideas."	**Interdependency** "It's humbling that someone who works for me could get me fired."
Source of power:	**Formal authority** "I will finally be on top of the ladder."	**"Everything but"** "Folks were wary, and you really had to earn it."
Desired outcome:	**Control** "I must get compliance from my subordinates."	**Commitment** "Compliance does not equal commitment."
Managerial focus:	**Managing one-on-one** "My role is to build relationships with individual subordinates."	**Leading the team** "I need to create a culture that will allow the group to fulfill its potential."
Key challenge:	**Keeping the operation in working order** "My job is to make sure the operation runs smoothly."	**Making changes that will make the team perform better** "I am responsible for initiating changes to enhance the group's performance."

studied describe finding themselves hemmed in by interdependencies. Instead of feeling free, they feel constrained, especially if they were accustomed to the relative independence of a star performer. They are enmeshed in a web of relationships—not only with subordinates but also with bosses, peers, and others inside and outside the organization, all of whom make relentless and often conflicting demands on them. The resulting daily routine is pressured, hectic, and fragmented.

"The fact is that you really are not in control of anything," says one new manager. "The only time I am in control is when I shut my door, and then I feel I am not doing the job I'm supposed to be doing, which is being with the people." Another new manager observes: "It's humbling that someone who works for me could get me fired."

The people most likely to make a new manager's life miserable are those who don't fall under her formal authority: outside suppliers, for example, or managers in another division. Sally McDonald, a rising star at a chemical company, stepped into a product development position with high hopes, impeccable credentials as an individual performer, a deep appreciation for the company's culture—and even the supposed wisdom gained in a leadership development course. Three weeks later, she observed grimly: "Becoming a manager is not about becoming a boss. It's about becoming a hostage. There are many terrorists in this organization that want to kidnap me."

Until they give up the myth of authority for the reality of negotiating interdependencies, new managers will not be able to lead effectively. As we have seen, this goes beyond managing the team of direct reports and requires managing the context within which the team operates. Unless they identify and build effective relationships with the key people the team depends upon, the team will lack the resources necessary to do its job.

Even if new managers appreciate the importance of these relationships, they often ignore or neglect them and focus instead on what seems like the more immediate task of leading those closest to them: their subordinates. When they finally do accept their network-builder role, they often feel overwhelmed by its demands. Besides, negotiating with these other parties from a position of relative weakness—for that's often the plight of new managers at the bottom of the hierarchy—gets tiresome.

But the dividends of managing the interdependencies are great. While working in business development at a large U.S. media concern, Winona Finch

I repeatedly hear new managers describe situations in which they made an exception for one subordinate but ended up regretting the action's unexpected negative consequences for the team.

developed a business plan for launching a Latin American edition of the company's U.S. teen magazine. When the project got tentative approval, Finch asked to manage it. She and her team faced a number of obstacles. International projects were not favored by top management, and before getting final funding, Finch would need to secure agreements with regional distributors representing 20% of the Latin American market—not an easy task for an untested publication competing for scarce newsstand space. To control costs, her venture would have to rely on the sales staff of the Spanish-language edition of the company's flagship women's magazine, people who were used to selling a very different kind of product.

Winona had served a stint as an acting manager two years before, so despite the morass of detail she had to deal with in setting up the new venture, she understood the importance of devoting time and attention to managing relationships with her superiors and peers. For example, she compiled biweekly executive notes from her department heads that she circulated to executives at headquarters. To enhance communication with the women's magazine, she initiated regular Latin American board meetings at which top worldwide executives from both the teen and women's publications could discuss regional strategy.

Her prior experience notwithstanding, she faced the typical stresses of a new manager: "It's like you are in final exams 365 days a year," she says. Still, the new edition was launched on schedule and exceeded its business plan forecasts.

Authority flows from the manager's position. Don't get me wrong: Despite the interdependencies that constrain them, new managers do wield some power. The problem is that most of them mistakenly believe their power is based on the formal authority that comes with their now lofty—well, relatively speaking—position in the hierarchy. This operating assumption leads many to adopt a hands-on, autocratic approach, not because they are eager to exercise their new power over people but because they believe it is the most effective way to produce results.

New managers soon learn, however, that when direct reports are told to do something, they don't necessarily respond. In fact, the more talented the subordinate, the less likely she is to simply follow orders. (Some new managers, when pressed, admit that they didn't always listen to their bosses either.)

After a few painful experiences, new managers come to the unsettling realization that the source of their power is, according to one, "everything but" formal authority. That is, authority emerges only as the manager establishes credibility with subordinates, peers, and superiors. "It took me three months to realize I had no effect on many of my people," recalls one manager I followed. "It was like I was talking to myself."

Many new managers are surprised by how difficult it is to earn people's respect and trust. They are shocked, and even insulted, that their expertise and track record don't speak for themselves. My research shows that many also aren't aware of the qualities that contribute to credibility.

They need to demonstrate their *character*—the intention to do the right thing. This is of particular importance to subordinates, who tend to analyze every statement and nonverbal gesture for signs of the new boss's motives. Such scrutiny can be unnerving. "I knew I was a good guy, and I kind of expected people to accept me immediately for what I was," says one new manager. "But folks were wary, and you really had to earn it."

They need to demonstrate their *competence*—knowing how to do the right thing. This can be problematic, because new managers initially feel the need to prove their technical knowledge and prowess, the foundations of their success as individual performers. But while evidence of technical competence is important in gaining subordinates' respect, it isn't ultimately the primary area of competence that direct reports are looking for.

When Peter Isenberg took over the management of a trading desk in a global investment bank, he oversaw a group of seasoned, senior traders. To establish his credibility, he adopted a hands-on approach, advising traders to close down particular positions or try different trading strategies. The traders pushed back, demanding to know the rationale for each directive. Things got uncomfortable. The traders' responses to their new boss's comments became prickly and terse. One day, Isenberg, who recognized his lack of knowledge about foreign markets, asked one of the senior people a simple question about pricing. The trader stopped what he was doing for several minutes to explain the issue and offered to discuss the matter

About half of new managers turn to their bosses for assistance. Many are relieved to find their superiors more tolerant of their questions and mistakes than they had expected.

further at the end of the day. "Once I stopped talking all the time and began to listen, people on the desk started to educate me about the job and, significantly, seemed to question my calls far less," Isenberg says.

The new manager's eagerness to show off his technical competence had undermined his credibility as a manager and leader. His eagerness to jump in and try to solve problems raised implicit questions about his managerial competence. In the traders' eyes, he was becoming a micromanager and a "control freak" who didn't deserve their respect.

Finally, new managers need to demonstrate their *influence*—the ability to deliver and execute the right thing. There is "nothing worse than working for a powerless boss," says a direct report of one new manager I studied. Gaining and wielding influence within the organization is particularly difficult because, as I have noted, new managers are the "little bosses" of the organization. "I was on top of the world when I knew I was finally getting promoted," one new manager says. "I felt like I would be on the top of the ladder I had been climbing for years. But then I suddenly felt like I was at the bottom again—except this time it's not even clear what the rungs are and where I am climbing to."

Once again, we see a new manager fall into the trap of relying too heavily on his formal authority as his source of influence. Instead, he needs to build his influence by creating a web of strong, interdependent relationships, based on credibility and trust, throughout his team and the entire organization—one strand at a time.

Managers must control their direct reports. Most new managers, in part because of insecurity in an unfamiliar role, yearn for compliance from their subordinates. They fear that if they don't establish this early on, their direct reports will walk all over them. As a means of gaining this control, they often rely too much on their formal authority—a technique whose effectiveness is, as we have seen, questionable at best.

But even if they are able to achieve some measure of control, whether through formal authority or authority earned over time, they have achieved a false victory. Compliance does not equal commitment. If people aren't committed, they won't take the initiative. And if subordinates aren't taking the initiative, the manager can't delegate effectively. The direct reports won't take the calculated risks that lead to the continuous change and improvement required by today's turbulent business environment.

Winona Finch, who led the launch of the teen magazine in Latin America, knew she faced a business challenge that would require her team's total support. She had in fact been awarded the job in part because of her personal style, which her superiors hoped would compensate for her lack of experience in the Latin American market and in managing profit-and-loss responsibilities. In addition to being known as a clear thinker, she had a warm and personable way with people. During the project, she successfully leveraged these natural abilities in developing her leadership philosophy and style.

Instead of relying on formal authority to get what she wanted from her team, she exercised influence by creating a culture of inquiry. The result was an organization in which people felt empowered, committed, and accountable for fulfilling the company's vision. "Winona was easygoing and fun," a subordinate says. "But she would ask and ask and ask to get to the bottom of something. You would say something to her, she would say it back to you, and that way everyone was 100% clear on what we were talking about. Once she got the information and knew what you were doing, you had to be consistent. She would say, 'You told me X; why are you doing Y? I'm confused.'" Although she was demanding, she didn't demand that people do things her way. Her subordinates were committed to the team's goals because they were empowered, not ordered, to achieve them.

The more power managers are willing to share with subordinates in this way, the more influence they tend to command. When they lead in a manner that allows their people to take the initiative, they build their own credibility as managers.

Managers must focus on forging good individual relationships. Managing interdependencies and exercising informal authority derived from personal credibility require new managers to build trust, influence, and mutual expectations with a wide array of people. This is often achieved by establishing productive personal relationships. Ultimately, however, the new manager must figure out how to harness the power of a team. Simply focusing on one-on-one relationships with members of the team can undermine that process.

During their first year on the job, many new managers fail to recognize, much less address, their team-building responsibilities. Instead, they conceive of their people-management role as building the most effective relationships they can with each individual subordinate, erroneously equating the management of their team with managing the individuals on the team.

They attend primarily to individual performance and pay little or no attention to team culture and performance. They hardly ever rely on group forums for identifying and solving problems. Some spend too much time with a small number of trusted subordinates, often those who seem most supportive. New managers tend to handle issues, even those with teamwide implications, one-on-one. This leads them to make decisions based on unnecessarily limited information.

In his first week as a sales manager at a Texas software company, Roger Collins was asked by a subordinate for an assigned parking spot that had just become available. The salesman had been at the company for years, and Collins, wanting to get off to a good start with this veteran, said, "Sure, why not?" Within the hour, another salesman, a big moneymaker, stormed into Collins's office threatening to quit. It seems the shaded parking spot was coveted for pragmatic and symbolic reasons, and the beneficiary of Collins's casual gesture was widely viewed as incompetent. The manager's decision was unfathomable to the star.

Collins eventually solved what he regarded as a trivial management problem—"This is not the sort of thing I'm supposed to be worrying about," he said—but he began to recognize that every decision about individuals affected the team. He had been working on the assumption that if he could establish a good relationship with each person who reported to him, his whole team would function smoothly. What he learned was that supervising each individual was not the same as leading the team. In my research, I repeatedly hear new managers describe situations in which they made an exception for one subordinate—usually with the aim of creating a positive relationship with that person—but ended up regretting the action's unexpected negative consequences for the team. Grasping this notion can be especially difficult for up-and-comers who have been able to accomplish a great deal on their own.

When new managers focus solely on one-on-one relationships, they neglect a fundamental aspect of effective leadership: harnessing the collective power of the group to improve individual performance and commitment. By shaping team culture—the group's norms and values—a leader can unleash the problem-solving prowess of the diverse talents that make up the team.

Managers must ensure that things run smoothly. Like many managerial myths, this one is partly true but is misleading because it tells only some of the story. Making sure an operation is operating smoothly is an incredibly difficult task, requiring a manager to keep countless balls in the air at all times. Indeed, the complexity of maintaining the status quo can absorb all of a junior manager's time and energy.

But new managers also need to realize they are responsible for recommending and initiating changes that will enhance their groups' performance. Often—and it comes as a surprise to most—this means challenging organizational processes or structures that exist above and beyond their area of formal authority. Only when they understand this part of the job will they begin to address seriously their leadership responsibilities. (See the sidebar "Oh, One More Thing: Create the Conditions for Your Success.")

In fact, most new managers see themselves as targets of organizational change initiatives, implementing with their groups the changes ordered from above. They don't see themselves as change agents. Hierarchical thinking and their fixation on the authority that comes with being the boss lead them to define their responsibilities too narrowly. Consequently, they tend to blame flawed systems, and the superiors directly responsible for those systems, for their teams' setbacks—and they tend to wait for other people to fix the problems.

But this represents a fundamental misunderstanding of their role within the organization. New managers need to generate changes, both within *and outside* their areas of responsibility, to ensure that their teams can succeed. They need to work to change the context in which their teams operate, ignoring their lack of formal authority.

This broader view benefits the organization as well as the new manager. Organizations must continually revitalize and transform themselves. They can meet these challenges only if they have cadres of effective leaders capable of both managing the complexity of the status quo and initiating change.

Oh, One More Thing: Create the Conditions for Your Success

New managers often discover, belatedly, that they are expected to do more than just make sure their groups function smoothly today. They must also recommend and initiate changes that will help their groups do even better in the future.

A new marketing manager at a telecommunications company whom I'll call John Delhorne discovered that his predecessor had failed to make critical investments, so he tried on numerous occasions to convince his immediate superior to increase the marketing budget. He also presented a proposal to acquire a new information system that could allow his team to optimize its marketing initiatives. When he could not persuade his boss to release more money, he hunkered down and focused on changes within his team that would make it as productive as possible under the circumstances. This course seemed prudent, especially because his relationship with his boss, who was taking longer and longer to answer Delhorne's emails, was becoming strained.

When the service failed to meet certain targets, the CEO unceremoniously fired Delhorne because, Delhorne was told, he hadn't been proactive. The CEO chastised Delhorne for "sitting back and not asking for his help" in securing the funds needed to succeed in a critical new market. Delhorne, shocked and hurt, thought the CEO was being grossly unfair. Delhorne contended it wasn't his fault that the company's strategic-planning and budgeting procedures were flawed. The CEO's response: It was Delhorne's responsibility to create the conditions for his success.

New Managers Aren't Alone

As they go through the daunting process of becoming a boss, new managers can gain a tremendous advantage by learning to recognize the misconceptions I've just outlined. But given the multilayered nature of their new responsibilities, they are still going to make mistakes as they try to put together the managerial puzzle—and making mistakes, no matter how important to the learning process, is no fun. They are going to feel pain as their professional identities are stretched and reshaped. As they struggle to learn a new role, they will often feel isolated.

Unfortunately, my research has shown that few new managers ask for help. This is in part the outcome of yet another misconception: The boss is supposed to have all the answers, so seeking help is a sure sign that a new manager is a "promotion mistake." Of course, seasoned managers know that no one has all the answers. The insights a manager does possess come over time, through experience. And, as countless studies show, it is easier to learn on the job if you can draw on the support and assistance of peers and superiors.

Another reason new managers don't seek help is that they perceive the dangers (sometimes more imagined than real) of forging developmental relationships. When you share your anxieties, mistakes, and shortcomings with peers in your part of the organization, there's a risk that the individuals will use that information against you. The same goes for sharing your problems with your superior. The inherent conflict between the roles of evaluator and developer is an age-old dilemma. So new managers need to be creative in finding support. For instance, they might seek out peers who are outside their region or function or in another organization altogether. The problem with bosses, while difficult to solve neatly, can be alleviated. And herein lies a lesson not only for new managers but for experienced bosses, as well.

The new manager avoids turning to her immediate superior for advice because she sees that person as a threat to, rather than an ally in, her development. Because she fears punishment for missteps and failures, she resists seeking the help that might prevent such mistakes, even when she's desperate for it. As one new manager reports:

"I know on one level that I should deal more with my manager because that is what he is there for. He's got the experience, and I probably owe it to him to go to him and tell him what's up. He would probably have some good advice. But it's not safe to share with him. He's an unknown quantity. If you ask too many questions, he may lose confidence in you and think things aren't going very well. He may see that you are a little bit out of control, and then you really have a tough job. Because he'll be down there lickety-split, asking lots

When a new manager can develop a good relationship with his boss, it can make all the difference in the world—though not necessarily in ways the new manager expects.

of questions about what you are doing, and before you know it, he'll be involved right in the middle of it. That's a really uncomfortable situation. He's the last place I'd go for help."

Such fears are often justified. Many a new manager has regretted trying to establish a mentoring relationship with his boss. "I don't dare even ask a question that could be perceived as naive or stupid," says one. "Once I asked him a question and he made me feel like I was a kindergartner in the business. It was as if he had said, 'That was the dumbest thing I've ever seen. What on earth did you have in mind?'"

This is a tragically lost opportunity for the new manager, the boss, and the organization as a whole. It means that the new manager's boss loses a chance to influence the manager's initial conceptions and misconceptions of her new position and how she should approach it. The new manager loses the chance to draw on organizational assets—from financial resources to information about senior management's priorities—that the superior could best provide.

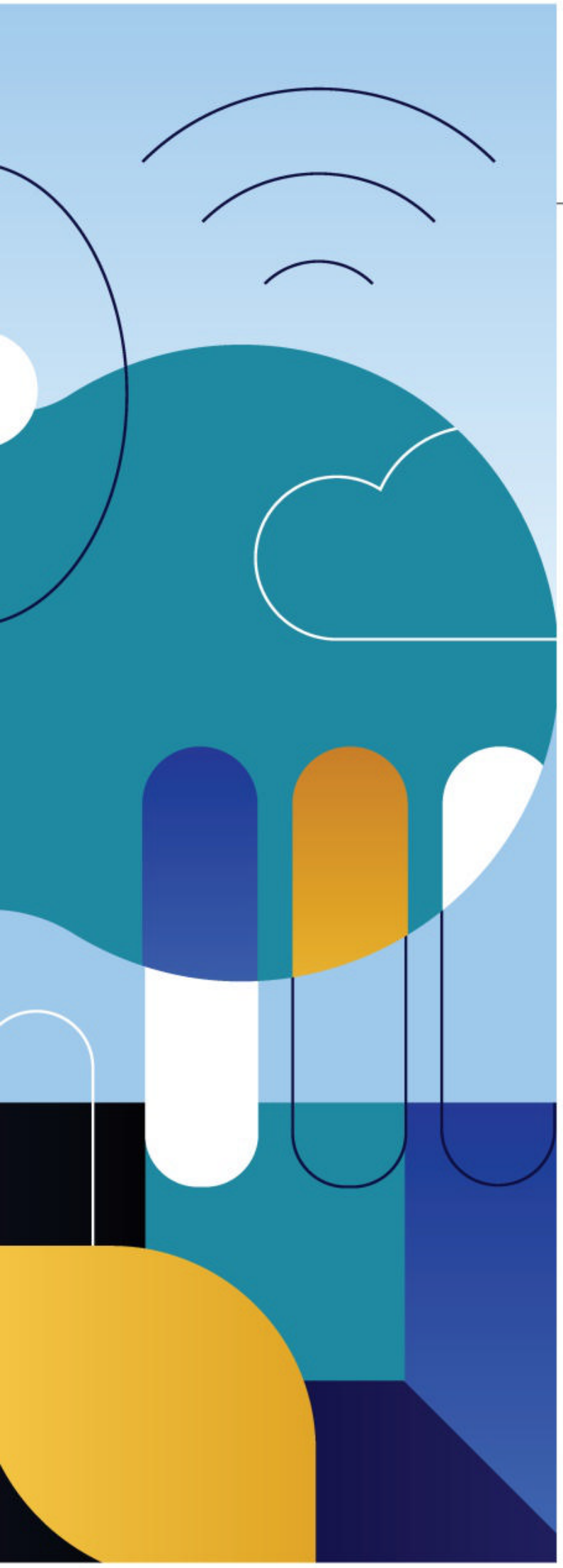
When a new manager can develop a good relationship with his boss, it can make all the difference in the world—though not necessarily in ways the new manager expects. My research suggests that eventually about half of new managers turn to their bosses for assistance, often because of a looming crisis. Many are relieved to find their superiors more tolerant of their questions and mistakes than they had expected. "He recognized that I was still in the learning mode and was more than willing to help in any way he could," recalls one new manager.

Sometimes, the most expert mentors can seem deceptively hands-off. One manager reports how she learned from an immediate superior: "She is demanding, but she enjoys a reputation for growing people and helping them, not throwing them to the wolves. I wasn't sure after the first 60 days, though. Everything was so hard and I was so frustrated, but she didn't offer to help. It was driving me nuts. When I asked her a question, she asked me a question. I got no answers. Then I saw what she wanted. I had to come in with some ideas about how I would handle the situation, and then she would talk about them with me. She would spend all the time in the world with me."

His experience vividly highlights why it's important for the bosses of new managers to understand—or simply recall—how difficult it is to step into a management role for the first time. Helping a new manager succeed doesn't benefit only that individual. Ensuring the new manager's success is also crucially important to the success of the entire organization.

HBR Reprint R0701D

Linda A. Hill *is the Wallace Brett Donham Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School and chair of the Leadership Initiative. Her latest book, which she coauthored, is* Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2014).*



ORIGINALLY AIRED ON *DEAR HBR:* JUNE 13, 2019

Stretch Responsibilities

Getting outside your comfort zone: HBR's advice podcast addresses listener questions with Jerry Colonna.

→hosted by ALISON BEARD and DAN McGINN

DAN McGINN: Welcome to *Dear HBR:* from *Harvard Business Review.* I'm Dan McGinn.

ALISON BEARD: And I'm Alison Beard. Work can be frustrating, but it doesn't have to be. We don't need to let the conflicts get us down.

McGINN: That's where *Dear HBR:* comes in. We take your questions, look at the research, talk to the experts, and help you move forward.

BEARD: Today we're talking about stretch goals with Jerry Colonna. He's an executive coach and former venture capitalist, and the author of the book *Reboot: Leadership and the Art of Growing Up.* Jerry, thanks so much for coming on the show.

JERRY COLONNA: Oh, thanks for having me. It's a blast to be here.

BEARD: So, when you were a VC, you were often investing in unproven people, and now you're a coach. How can you tell when someone is ready to stretch?

COLONNA: Well, usually they break out in a sweat and start shaking. *[Laughter]* "Ugh, do I really have to grow? I don't really want to grow. Oh my God, I'm growing!"

BEARD: But how do you know that they're ready?

Illustration by **KOIVO**

COLONNA: I watch and see the ways in which they are responding to new assignments and—this may sound odd—the mistakes that they're making. As a father of a friend of mine likes to say, if you're not standing on the edge, you're taking up too much space.

BEARD: There is this inherent risk of failure though. Have you seen people take stretch goals and not do them well?

COLONNA: Of course. But Alison, you say that as if failure's the problem. You know, not to get all Zen Buddhism on you, but there's something really, really powerful and liberating when we think about each step in stretching toward doing something new as precisely that. And the expectation is we are going to get it wrong. That's growth, that's learning.

■■■

McGINN: *Dear HBR: A year and a half ago I relocated with my family to a new part of the country. I took a job at a new industry and in a role that was completely new to me. I was hired for some of the finance skills I had developed in previous jobs.*

Also, to put it bluntly, my new employer is a small firm in a small market, and my manager was struggling to find qualified people. The role was a bit of a step back. But I worked hard and we made it through a novel companywide project. It received a lot of attention from senior management and from the board. Because of his visibility on this project and his skills, my boss quickly moved up, creating a need for someone to take his position. He believed I could fill the role.

I was very hesitant, but eventually they offered me the job, and I didn't feel like I could turn it down. The bump in income would help at home. The increase in responsibility scared me. Here's what I was worried about: I had never even seen a lot of the types of work that I'm now involved in. I still have so much to learn and get up to speed on.

My boss understands my concerns. He's assured me that at least for the first year or so, things won't change much from the way we handled the work last year and that he will help me out whenever I need it.

But part of me worries that eventually he's going to drop something in my lap and say good luck. The reality is he's busy. Most of the guidance I get from him is on the fly. I'm beginning to understand what people mean by "impostor syndrome." I feel like a total fraud. It's a fairly small office, and everyone recognizes how new I am. They have to know that I don't have experience in this kind of technical role. I worry people will think I should not have been promoted. What can I do?

Jerry, what's your initial reaction?

COLONNA: New job, new city, new circumstances: new, new, new. Well, there's that stretching.

One of the last episodes of *Mad Men* comes to mind for me. The executive assistant who worked for Don, Peggy, gets promoted up the ranks. In one of my favorite scenes, Peggy has basically become the boss, and she's coming to Don trying to figure out what to do. And she's breathless and filled with anxiety. And she's like, "Don, I don't know what to do," and he looks at her in that sort of weird, sagelike way, and he says, "Welcome to the not knowing."

BEARD: Because he's the master of faking it till you make it. So, is that what you're supposed to do?

COLONNA: He not only is the master of faking it till you make it, but he's actually saying something that's genuine and true, which is that leading and stepping into that leadership is "Welcome to the not knowing."

McGINN: Yeah, I think one of the things that's important about impostor syndrome is that everybody feels that way at some point.

COLONNA: Exactly.

McGINN: It's a universal feeling. Everybody thinks, "Oh, it's just me. I'm the only one that doesn't know what I'm doing." No, everybody feels that way.

COLONNA: That's right. Buried within the universality is the opportunity for your own self-growth, because wait a minute, so here I am in that impostor syndrome moment. I don't know what the hell I'm doing. I'm worried everybody's going to figure it out—wait, *everybody's* walking around feeling that way?

BEARD: To clarify, "impostor syndrome" is a term originally coined by two psychologists. It basically means having self-doubt, insecurity, worry

"Don't fake it. Don't walk around and pretend that you know, when, in fact, you don't know. I actually think that that feeds the impostor syndrome."

that you're inadequate—and that it's going to be discovered.

COLONNA: That last bit, Alison, that it's going to be discovered—that's really important, because it's not merely having self-doubt, it's having self-doubt in the midst of a bunch of people who somehow have figured out that you don't know what you're doing.

McGINN: So, even if this is totally normal, it's not very pleasant. What constructive advice can we give him to try to reduce these unpleasant, insecure feelings?

COLONNA: Well, first connect with the universality of it. Don't fake it. Don't walk around and pretend that you know, when, in fact, you don't know. I actually think that that feeds the impostor syndrome.

BEARD: Absolutely. We published a great piece by Andy Molinsky at Brandeis who talks about recognizing the benefits of being a novice. You know, don't act as if you are an expert: Understand that you're not, and then ask really smart questions.

COLONNA: The most underutilized statement in these situations is "I don't know. I haven't done this before. What would you do?"

McGINN: There's a happy medium in terms of advertising his lack of technical skill and his novice status. But I think he probably wants to err on the side of acknowledging he's not a supertechnical person and he's going to need some learning curve and some help with this.

BEARD: And I think that will go a long way toward his employees embracing him as a leader.

COLONNA: There's a corollary to this: When a leader, in a new situation, in a stretch goal, is able to connect with the reality of what they know and don't know and speak truthfully about that, there's this lovely benefit that occurs called *trust*. Then all of a sudden you start to pull the team together and people start rooting for you.

McGINN: In terms of people rooting for him, the thing that I like most about our listener's situation is that his boss sounds like a really good guy who wants him to succeed and has the technical skills to help him succeed. But how can our listener get the knowledge he needs from a supportive boss who's crazy busy?

COLONNA: And it sounds like the boss believes in the listener.

BEARD: And there are clearly other people in the organization who feel the same way because they offered him this promotion.

COLONNA: That's right. We can see that reality because we're not in that listener's body feeling the panic. So the first thing you should do is say to yourself, "If I believe in these people, and they believe in me, then maybe this impostor syndrome isn't 100% accurate." Then you can walk into your boss's office or send an email and say, "Look, I know you're really busy. At some point in the next two weeks, can I get an hour with you?" And develop that regular cadence

Idea in Brief

FAKING IT?
A new job, a promotion, your first leadership role—all are workplace situations that can make you feel like a fraud, and worse, that someone else might think you are. How can you find confidence when you're outside your comfort zone?

TRY THIS
Executive coach Jerry Colonna advises embracing the opportunity for self-growth. Don't fake it; if you don't know something, acknowledge that and ask smart questions. Believe that your colleagues believe in you. Establish regular check-ins with your boss and look for early wins; that will alleviate anxiety. And turn to other sources—downward and even outside your organization—for more information or training.

MAKING IT
Understand that feeling like an impostor at work is actually normal and widespread. Being authentic, listening, asking questions, and looking for early wins will help you build confidence in your role and establish trust in your team.

"As long as you are on a perpetual learning path, eventually you'll be able to handle the job."

of communication. That will go a long way toward easing some of the anxiety.

McGINN: It sounds like our listener is reluctant to bother his busy boss with questions, and everybody wants to be respectful of their boss's time. But it's in everybody's best interest here for this knowledge to get transferred and for our listener to succeed in this role. Because if he fails, it's going to be problematic for the organization. He's already said that this company really has a hard time finding qualified people. So, everybody here wants him to succeed, and he needs to think about that when he's reluctant about asking for time.

BEARD: And going back to the team rooting for him, he talks about it being a small office, but he doesn't say anything about anyone being resentful or some rival being angry that they weren't promoted to the position, so I do think that he's underestimating everyone's support for him.

COLONNA: I think you're spot-on.

McGINN: Do you think that any of the people below him in the hierarchy might have some of these skills? Instead of just looking upward, up the ladder, to get the training and technical know-how he needs, I wonder if he could look downward and see if the people that are on his new team might be able to transfer some of those skills.

COLONNA: That's a great observation. Those people may, in fact, be dying to be able to share that technical knowledge. They may be looking for that opportunity to shine. And that's also something a good leader can do.

BEARD: I also wonder whether he could find a training program or work with a consultant to build those skills as rapidly as he can without taking too much time from his boss.

COLONNA: Yes, or peer groups—cross-functional groups of people with similar responsibilities, either within your organization, or even outside it. That can be an enormous resource for people. But you have to be willing to admit that you don't know something in order to get the value out of a peer relationship.

McGINN: Since part of his problem seems to be confidence, maybe he can talk directly with the boss and say, "Look, we just did this big project together that was successful when I was in my old role. Is there anything we can do in the first three months in this new role I'm in that will be a success, give us a win, and maybe give me a little bit of a boost I need to feel like I'm actually qualified to do this?"

COLONNA: Those early wins are a great way to foster a sense of shared accomplishment of a goal.

BEARD: Is there any chance that our letter writer is right and that he has been promoted beyond his abilities?

COLONNA: Sure. And I think that that's sort of an interesting stretch point, right? Because people are promoted beyond their abilities—or let's call it promoted prematurely—all the time. That's what fast-growing companies need to do. There are many people within the organization who are probably being stretched by being promoted into positions that under traditional circumstances they may not have been qualified for.

BEARD: Right. And then as long as you are on a perpetual learning path, eventually you'll be able to handle the job. That's another great bit of advice from Andy Molinsky: that you should measure yourself not by everything that you're getting done or how much you know, but by how much you're learning each day or how much better you are getting.

McGINN: That's a great point. That can almost be part of our listener's messaging to his boss: "I realize I'm not the perfect person for this job, but the company seems to think that I'm the best available under these circumstances, and I'm going to do my best to learn and get up to speed."

COLONNA: That's great. I'd add: "I welcome your feedback when you see the things that I could be learning." And that just opens up all the space for growth.

BEARD: So, Dan, what are we telling our letter writer who feels like an impostor?

McGINN: Well, first he's *not* an impostor. What he's feeling is totally normal and widespread, and we think he's well situated here because he has a good boss who's invested in him and has the

know-how to help him learn the skills he needs.

Then they need to get into a very good structured check-in kind of schedule. Don't see this as a burden; it's the boss's job.

At the same time, the listener should recognize that there might be other sources of know-how that he can tap into. He can look toward peers or even subordinates in the organization, some of whom may have the technical skills that he lacks. He can look outside the organization, whether it's informally through peer organizations or more formally through some sort of training program.

And finally, we think it would be great if he and the boss came up with a plan to get him some early wins in the new role to help develop his confidence and to help prove to everybody that he is making progress in getting up to speed and the requirements of the job.

■■■

McGINN: *Dear HBR: I work in the tech field. I've recently changed jobs, going from a huge organization to a much smaller one. I'm now the most senior engineer in my immediate team of five, and my manager wants me to provide technical leadership to the team. Before I joined, the other four members had been working on the project for about four months. They're a very smart bunch, though some of them are barely out of college.*

I've never been in a similar situation before. I've either joined an established team with more-senior engineers who helped me out, or I started from scratch and had other engineers join in later. This is the first time I'm expected to come in and lead from behind. My manager has not given me useful guidance on this. What should I do?

COLONNA: I love this question because there's an implicit understanding about leadership that is somewhat false: that leadership can only come from the front. I applaud the organization for being able to ask people at various levels to lead. This is really good training. One of the great things for an organization's culture is to give people small bits of leadership opportunities throughout the organizational structure. Hats off to the manager who asked our listener to step in.

BEARD: One tension I see is that it's unclear whether the manager has told the rest of the team that he wants our letter writer to be their leader, and it's unclear whether he has any formal leadership role. How does he navigate that?

COLONNA: One of the first things to do would be to clarify whether that has been communicated, because otherwise the listener is in danger of being perceived as arrogant or assuming too much. That would be the first thing I would ask for.

McGINN: This kind of leadership is a little bit tricky because it doesn't sound like these people are going to report to him. It sounds like he isn't going to have a lot of authority and instead it's more like coaching, passing on technical wisdom, not being the manager.

COLONNA: That's tricky, but I think it can be rewarding as well. It's leadership without power.

BEARD: That does not sound rewarding to me. *[Laughter]*

COLONNA: Don't be so terrified. It's leadership that stems from the internal capacity of the individual and the way in which the individual holds themselves. The manager who is asking for this is seeing something in our listener that that listener may not see, and that's really fascinating.

BEARD: There does seem to be a generational element here too. You know, he's an older person coming into an existing team of younger people. While he's trying to break his way onto the team, he's also being tasked with leading them. How does he get over the perception that he's just the old guy coming in and telling everyone what to do?

COLONNA: I would embrace the gravitas that comes from wisdom and life experience. That's different from faking authority.

McGINN: In this situation, it seems like figuring out whether he wants to have a push system or a pull system would be important. Is his role going to be to proactively teach and correct and instruct, or is it more to wait for questions to come up, like the local help desk that the younger people can come to? Figuring that dynamic out seems like it would be important to be effective and to fit in.

BEARD: I vote for pull. I think he should get to know people and then explain that his door or cubicle is always open.

COLONNA: I'm a Buddhist, and I can't help but vote for the middle way. I would advise them to listen a heck of a lot, like you, Alison. Then I would use the word "coax" and create conditions for people to come forward. I wouldn't take the posture of imposing wisdom—"let me tell you how to do it." That can create all sorts of negative dynamics. But ask some powerful questions that are open and honest to coax and invite more participation.

BEARD: When I'm thinking about people starting a new job, and particularly taking new leadership roles, I always go to Michael Watkins, author of *The First 90 Days,* who suggests a handful of questions you can ask right out of the starting gate just to get people aligned. They are: What will we accomplish? Why are we doing it? How are we going to do it? and Who's going to do what? These will set the team up for a discussion that allows people to have input and opens a conversation for all of these technical issues that they need to figure out together—with our letter writer's leadership.

COLONNA: I'd add some questions specifically for this listener: How would we know that the project's succeeded? What would the benefit to the organization be if the project succeeded? What resources would we need in order to accomplish this? The idea is to pull the team together early in the process to jointly imagine what their success would look like.

BEARD: Dan, you talked earlier about early wins, and I think that is critical here: demonstrating that he's adding value by pulling the team together and getting them to execute on something sort of more quickly or more efficiently, or at higher quality than they would have otherwise.

COLONNA: This doesn't really feel like leading from behind; it's more leading from shoulder to shoulder standing together. That's harder. To your point earlier, Alison, that's harder because you're leading by dint of your gravitas, not necessarily by dint of organizational structure. You're the boss; therefore you make the decision. Leadership that's like that just inculcates a much healthier culture and allows everybody to step up and grow up.

BEARD: I think that our letter writer can also start to create a learning culture just by demonstrating that he wants to learn from his colleagues too. Even though he has more experience, and maybe more skills, surely there are elements of their work that they are expert at that he can take away lessons from.

So, Dan, what are we telling our listener?

McGINN: Leadership, as our listener recognizes, doesn't only come from the front. He's being asked to provide leadership in a different kind of structure than he's used to, but this is a good thing—it's a growth opportunity for him. Hats off to his organization for setting up this kind of structure!

Leading without formal power does take a little bit of getting used to and will probably feel a little bit more like coaching. We think he should utilize his experience, age, and gravitas.

He should listen and ask a lot of questions and try to create an environment where people will bring him questions and problems, rather than his getting into their business all the time.

Lastly, it's important in this kind of soft leadership environment that he not fake authority that he doesn't have and that he work appropriately to be more of an adviser than a boss.

Episode 37 of Dear HBR: *originally aired on June 13, 2019. This transcript has been edited for clarity and length.*

Alison Beard *is an executive editor at* Harvard Business Review *and is also cohost of the* HBR IdeaCast. *She previously worked as a reporter and editor at the* Financial Times. ***Daniel McGinn*** *is an executive editor at HBR and the author of* Psyched Up: How the Science of Mental Preparation Can Help You Succeed *(Portfolio, 2017).* ***Jerry Colonna*** *is the CEO and senior executive coach at the leadership development firm Reboot.io and the author of* Reboot: Leadership and the Art of Growing Up *(Harper Business, 2019).*

We made our family tighter and our business stronger with one round of golf.

Never have the words, "Yes sir," been so cutting as when I heard it from my sister. My authority within the family business had caused a rift in the family. Somewhere along the way, I'd stopped being a brother and became the CEO and chairman of the board instead. That's when Whit suggested that our annual charity golf tournament was the perfect opportunity to recapture some of the family magic of our childhood. A few laughs and a round of golf later, we'd reworked the business so Whit could handle decisions involving the family and I could focus on being a brother. Sometimes the big picture becomes clearer when you focus on **the little things**.

— David, San Diego

WhittierTrust

CONTACT TIM MCCARTHY | 626.463.2545 | WHITTIERTRUST.COM

Learn More

$10 MILLION MARKETABLE SECURITIES AND/OR LIQUID ASSETS REQUIRED. Investment and Wealth Management Services are provided by Whittier Trust Company and The Whittier Trust Company of Nevada, Inc. (referred to herein individually and collectively as "Whittier Trust"), state-chartered trust companies wholly owned by Whittier Holdings, Inc. ("WHI"), a closely held holding company. This document is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended, and should not be construed, as investment, tax or legal advice. Past performance is no guarantee of future results and no investment or financial planning strategy can guarantee profit or protection against losses. All names, characters, and incidents, except for certain incidental references, are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Quick Takes

JOEL GERONE LARUPAY/EYEEM/GETTY IMAGES

1. How to Gain Credibility When You Have Little Experience

→ by ANDY MOLINSKY AND JAKE NEWFIELD

THERE'S A MEME on the internet that speaks truth about a dilemma for young people entering the hyper-competitive workforce of 2017. The photo is of two seasoned, older interviewers glaring critically across the table at a young interview candidate with the following words: "We're looking for someone ages 22–26 … with 30 years of experience."

This credibility paradox is indeed a core dilemma many young people face as they enter the workforce. To be successful, young workers—or anyone starting a new job or career with little previous experience in a given field—need to be seen as credible before they have had the opportunity to build expertise from the ground up. It puts a new spin on the idea of "hitting the ground running." With the credibility paradox, there's no ground to run on; you need to have already covered the ground before even having started.

For the young and inexperienced, it's essential to overcome this challenge. Getting a fast start in your career will help you gain access to experiences and opportunities that will help you get noticed, be seen as a "high potential," and be given access to opportunities to learn and grow in your career. And not only young workers will benefit from solving this dilemma. It's critical for companies who spend thousands of dollars and countless hours of time recruiting, interviewing, screening, and onboarding new employees.

How can the credibility paradox be solved? In a new initiative at Brandeis University's Perlmutter Institute for Global Business Leadership, we're studying this exact problem. Early findings suggest it may be less of a paradox than we think. Young people have the resources to overcome their experience deficit. And they can take direct actions to compensate for and build the expertise they lack.

Here are five common activities that you can do as a young professional to jump-start your career and catalyze your leadership trajectory.

1. Leverage your research skills. One of the best ways to stand out in a corporate setting, even as someone with less work experience, is to develop unique knowledge that makes you a go-to resource for your colleagues and clients. An effective way of doing this is to use your research skills to synthesize and master industry-specific knowledge, trends, and information.

Chances are, if you've recently graduated from a university, you have a set of freshly honed research skills that you can put to immediate use in a professional context, but if you don't, work on them now. Find out what specific types of knowledge people in your industry crave—and lack—and build your area of expertise around it. Read relevant industry magazines and books, or watch YouTube videos from industry thought leaders. If you can make yourself a unique and helpful resource for solving problems, you'll

Young people can take direct actions to compensate for and build the expertise they lack.

quickly build credibility and be seen as a source of information by your colleagues.

2. Identify (and embrace) your specific contribution. Ask yourself some basic questions to identify your strengths and where you might be able to contribute value. In which areas do you feel you do your best work? What have you been praised for in the past? Think about your own best self and how you might describe that to someone. What would that be? Use your answers to generate strengths and resources that can become fodder for jump-starting your career and fast-tracking your professional growth.

Also consider your personal background. For instance, you may not have worked in the industry or this specific position before, but chances are, you possess useful insights simply because of your geographic or demographic background. Perhaps as a 20-something professional working on a marketing research project, you have ideas about the types of questions to ask people of your generation to yield the most valid and reliable data or about the most viable means of data collection. You don't want to become typecast or pigeonholed as someone with a narrow skill set or who speaks only from a particular perspective informed by their background, but using this as a starting point can build your initial credibility and positive regard, especially as a newcomer to the field and the organization.

3. Volunteer willingly. Don't underestimate the power of grit, determination, and a willingness to take on unenviable assignments. If, at the end of a group meeting, your department head requests more feedback from sales reps on a product line your team has been discussing, volunteer to track down the information. If your senior colleagues ask if anyone would be willing to scrape a big data set for trends that could support your team's case, take on the project—assuming, of course, you have the skill set to deliver. Opportunities abound to prove yourself. Take advantage of them to make a quick impression as a reliable and hard worker.

4. Manage your workload and communicate proactively. Although knowledge and experience take time to cultivate, you can immediately establish a reputation for reliability with your colleagues and superiors. Manage your commitments and workload wisely. Know when you're taking on too much, and say no judiciously (though as a junior employee, err on "yes" unless you really feel overtaxed). Also, be proactive with your communication. If you anticipate any difficulty in meeting a deadline, discuss it with your superior as soon as possible and ask for guidance when you need it. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

And don't forget the importance of follow-through. Bring every single assignment to its conclusion. Don't leave any details hanging or deadlines unmet. You may not be the most experienced person in the room, but you can become one of the most reliable.

5. Build a network of close relationships. Your goal over time will be to build a deep and varied network of trusted colleagues who will provide you with ongoing mentoring, advice, and feedback as you progress at your job and in your career. When you start out initially, your cupboard may be a bit bare in terms of trusted contacts and connections, but you will be surprised at how easily you can build up a network for yourself. Follow a similar approach you took in your schooling and post-graduation. You created a network of friends and academic colleagues in college and probably had to network when you looked for your job in the first place. Leverage these skills and apply them to your current situation. Invite coworkers to lunch. Identify superiors you admire and get a feel for how to connect with them within the culture of the organization. In some companies, you might be able to invite them directly to lunch or for a coffee. In others, you might want to wait until you've had more work experience with them before deepening the network tie.

The key, though, is to work hard at getting to know as many people as you can on a collegial or even more personal level. These contacts and connections can be critical mentors, sounding boards for your ideas, and potential advocates for you and your work throughout the organization. Demonstrate to them your motivation, commitment, and relevant expertise, and when possible, find ways you can be of service to them and help them with their work.

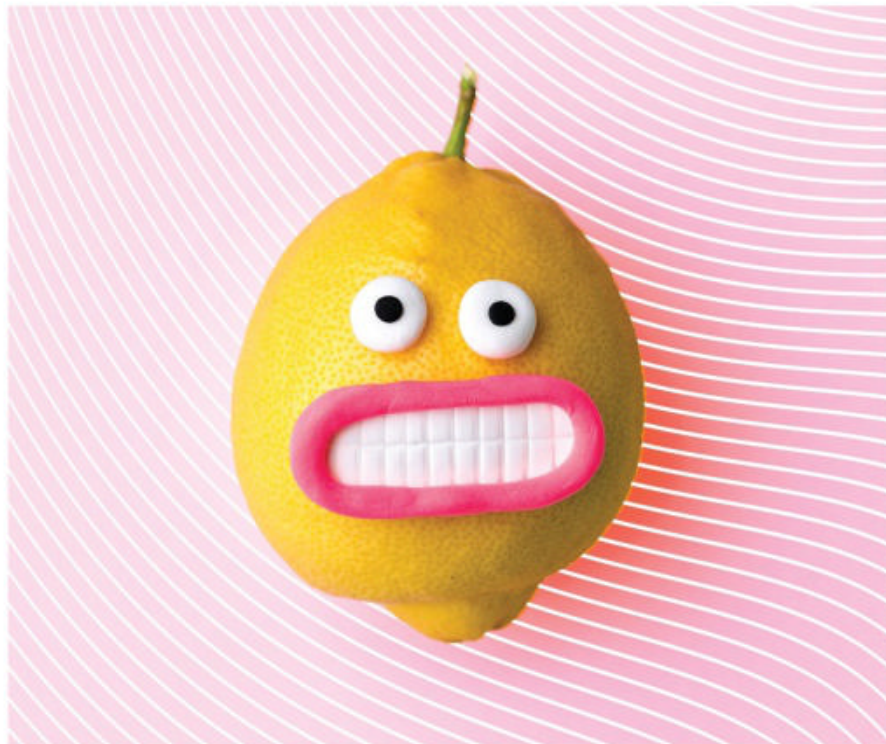
Expertise doesn't build on its own, and your coworkers won't see you as a crucial

part of the organization until you prove yourself to be one. But by developing the confidence to leverage the tools, assets, and capabilities you already have as a young worker, you can overcome the credibility paradox and jump-start your career in the process.

Originally published on HBR.org October 6, 2017

HBR Reprint H03XIO

Andy Molinsky *is a professor of organizational behavior and international management at Brandeis University and the author of* Global Dexterity: How to Adapt Your Behavior Across Cultures Without Losing Yourself in the Process *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2013) and* Reach: A New Strategy to Help You Step Outside Your Comfort Zone, Rise to the Occasion, and Build Confidence *(Avery, 2017). His work helps people step outside their personal and cultural comfort zones.* ***Jake Newfield*** *is a senior product manager specializing in artificial intelligence. He graduated from Columbia with an MBA.*



2. If You Want to Lead, Master This Skill

→ by DINA DENHAM SMITH

IF YOU'VE EVER asked a senior leader or a mentor what it takes to rise to the C-suite, their answer has most likely included "executive presence" in addition to timing, experience, network, and confidence. Author Sylvia Ann Hewitt describes it as "the missing link between merit and success," and a combination of self-confidence, poise, and authenticity that impacts your ability to inspire confidence in others to believe in and follow you.

That sounds pretty straightforward, right? But what's less clear is how exactly to develop executive presence. Feedback such as "You need to work on your presence" is often murky and difficult to decode, especially if you're a first-time manager or just starting out in your career.

My client, Nathan, recently went through this experience. Several months after joining a new company, he was blindsided and confused when his manager told him he needed to "level up his presence." When Nathan prodded further, he learned that his team found him "too informal," and it was causing him to lose credibility.

Even if you've never received feedback like this, it's worthwhile to consider the impression you're making on others—through your attitude, body language, and confidence. As a professional, you are being judged on your presence as well as your performance. People form an impression of others within seconds of meeting them. The real question, then, is not whether you'll create an impression but rather will you create the one that you want?

The good news is that anyone can build executive presence. With a little effort, you can improve yours.

Rely on feedback. Start by actively soliciting feedback on your presence. Especially if you lead, or aspire to, understanding your impact on others is essential. Ask your manager, direct reports, colleagues, and mentors questions such as:

- How would you (briefly) describe my style of presence?
- What's your general perception of me?

VOLANTHEVIST/GETTY IMAGES

Your voice, nonverbal behaviors, and appearance are all a part of your message and contribute to your presence.

• What can I do to communicate with more impact?

You can either create an anonymous survey and send it to trusted contacts to get candid responses or hold one-on-one meetings with close friends and colleagues. Asking your manager in particular for this kind of feedback will signal your interest in your professional growth and career development.

If you've recently changed roles or companies, these questions can also help you get attuned to how others perceive you, as well as the expectations of your new position.

Tune in to how you communicate. Your presence is inextricably linked to how you communicate—not just through words but through your nonverbal behavior as well. Everything you say and do sends a message.

Generally, you want to be clear and concise, and project a confident and action-oriented aura. For example, rather than saying, "I wonder if … ," say, "I see it this way based on X, Y, Z." When communicating with more-senior audiences, ask yourself: If they leave after two minutes, what do I want to make sure they understand? Structure your communication so that your recommendation or bottom line comes first, then add analysis and detail as needed.

Beyond the words you choose, consider how you use your voice and your accompanying nonverbal behaviors. Do you make good eye contact, project your voice, and stand up straight? Or do you speak softly or avert your gaze? Do you dress to fit the situation and match the image you want to project? Your voice, nonverbal behaviors, and appearance are all a part of your message and contribute to your presence—so be authentic to yourself but also to the kind of leader you aspire to be.

To increase your awareness of your communication style, request trusted colleagues to observe you in a meeting and provide feedback immediately afterward. If they provide entirely positive feedback, thank them, then ask, "What are two things I could do differently next time to be more impactful?"

When you're tasked with giving a presentation, have a colleague take a video, or record yourself on Zoom. There's nothing like seeing yourself on camera to highlight aspects of your communication that might be distracting or diminish your message. You may also be pleasantly surprised to see that the nervousness you feel on the inside doesn't manifest on the outside.

Experiment with new behaviors. On the basis of the feedback you received, choose just one or two presence-building behaviors to practice. For example, if you received feedback that you often seem flustered in meetings, you might practice behaviors that signal composure, such as using more pauses in your speaking and keeping your body more still. You might also watch a leader you admire who owns the room when speaking. Study what they do that makes them so effective and then try it out for size.

While new behaviors may feel uncomfortable at first, they shouldn't be entirely inauthentic. Your presence must build on your authenticity, because people can smell a fraud from miles away. And being perceived as phony or insincere will damage your career development.

Projecting a balance of warmth and competence is a common trait of influential people. Warmth signals that your intentions are good, and competence supports you acting on those intentions. That said, when we are the junior or less-experienced person in the room, we naturally tend to display a greater number of warm behaviors (also known as attractiveness markers). To increase your presence, adopt one or two behaviors that are more powerful, such as displaying a more serious expression, expanding your personal space, or using fewer verbal qualifiers such as "just" or "I think." Instead, simply state your opinions without these "protector" words.

In the midst of the busyness of the day, it's all too easy to lose sight of our behavioral goals, so choose a small visual cue as a reminder. For example, a client of mine purchased and wore a ring with a lioness design to remind herself to be more fearless in speaking up. It's also helpful to build a few minutes into your schedule before important meetings to recall and visualize how you want to show up. Because our neurons interpret imagery as equivalent to a real action, visualization helps us act in ways consistent with what we imagined.

Be present. Multitasking, mind wandering, or thinking about work that's piling up as you attend a meeting

or interact with others will detract from your presence. Instead, keep your focus on the moment, demonstrating that you're fully present by asking thoughtful questions or sharing comments that logically follow from the conversation.

By staying mentally present, you will be more attuned to both the content of the discussions you participate in and the people in the room. This enhanced awareness will help you show up in more intellectually and emotionally intelligent ways, and thereby demonstrate higher levels of executive presence.

Executive presence isn't an inherent characteristic reserved for the fortunate few. It's an acquirable skill that you can develop and improve with time. Start now. Decoding and developing this important asset will increase your chances of becoming the leader you want to be.

Originally published on HBR Ascend June 30, 2021

Dina Denham Smith *is an executive coach to senior leaders at world-leading brands such as Adobe, Netflix, PwC, Dropbox, Stripe, and numerous high-growth companies. A former business executive herself, she is the founder and CEO of Cognitas, and helps leaders and their teams reach new heights of success.*

WE ARE/GETTY IMAGES

3. Three Rules for Experts Who Want More Influence

→ by DORIE CLARK

IN THESE DAYS of social media chest-thumping, it seems like everyone is calling themselves an expert. This declaration is often in inverse proportion to how well known the person is. Back in the early days of my consulting career, I, too,

The first rule of expertise is never to call yourself an expert.

clamored to label myself an "expert," as though that would assuage potential clients who had never heard of me. Not so much.

The first rule of expertise, I've learned, is never to call yourself an expert. That's for others to determine. But becoming a recognized expert in a world of pretenders is increasingly valuable. Here's what I learned in the course of researching my book *Stand Out: How to Find Your Breakthrough Idea and Build a Following Around It* (Portfolio, 2015).

Cultivate true knowledge of your subject matter. This is the first ingredient in becoming a recognized expert. Ramit Sethi, the best-selling author of *I Will Teach You to Be Rich* (Workman, 2009), developed his knowledge of personal finance the hard way: through his personal experience of winning a college scholarship and then almost immediately losing half in the stock market. I better learn how money works, he recalls thinking, leading him to start his blog and master the techniques he now teaches. Nate Silver, the famed presidential prognosticator, similarly taught himself the statistical skills he needed by creating a tool to track baseball players' performance—techniques he later applied to the Electoral College.

Share your knowledge. If no one knows you're an expert, it doesn't really count. Sethi and Silver have written books to make their insights available to the broader public. Books themselves are rarely the most lucrative thing for a thought leader to focus on, but they're essential to idea dissemination and building a broader audience (and can generate substantial returns in other ways, such as through speaking fees). Even if your goal isn't to become an international thought leader, sharing your ideas in book form can be a powerful tool. In *Stand Out,* I tell the story of Miranda Aisling Hynes, who self-published a book about creativity and leveraged it to land a coveted job at an arts organization, as well as Mike Lydon, an urban planner who launched his business on the strength of a free self-published book that went viral and established his reputation.

Cultivate a following. Part of this comes naturally, as you create content over time and more people are exposed to your ideas. You move steadily from "Who's that?" to "I think I've heard of her" to "I love her work!" You also begin to have institutions jump on board and volunteer to spread your message further. When I first started to build my platform and create content regularly, I had to beg to get published, approaching dozens of publications and being rebuffed by all but a few. But within a few years, a major publication reached out to me on Twitter and asked me to start writing for them regularly. Now, they retweet my work and I have access to their fan base to grow my own.

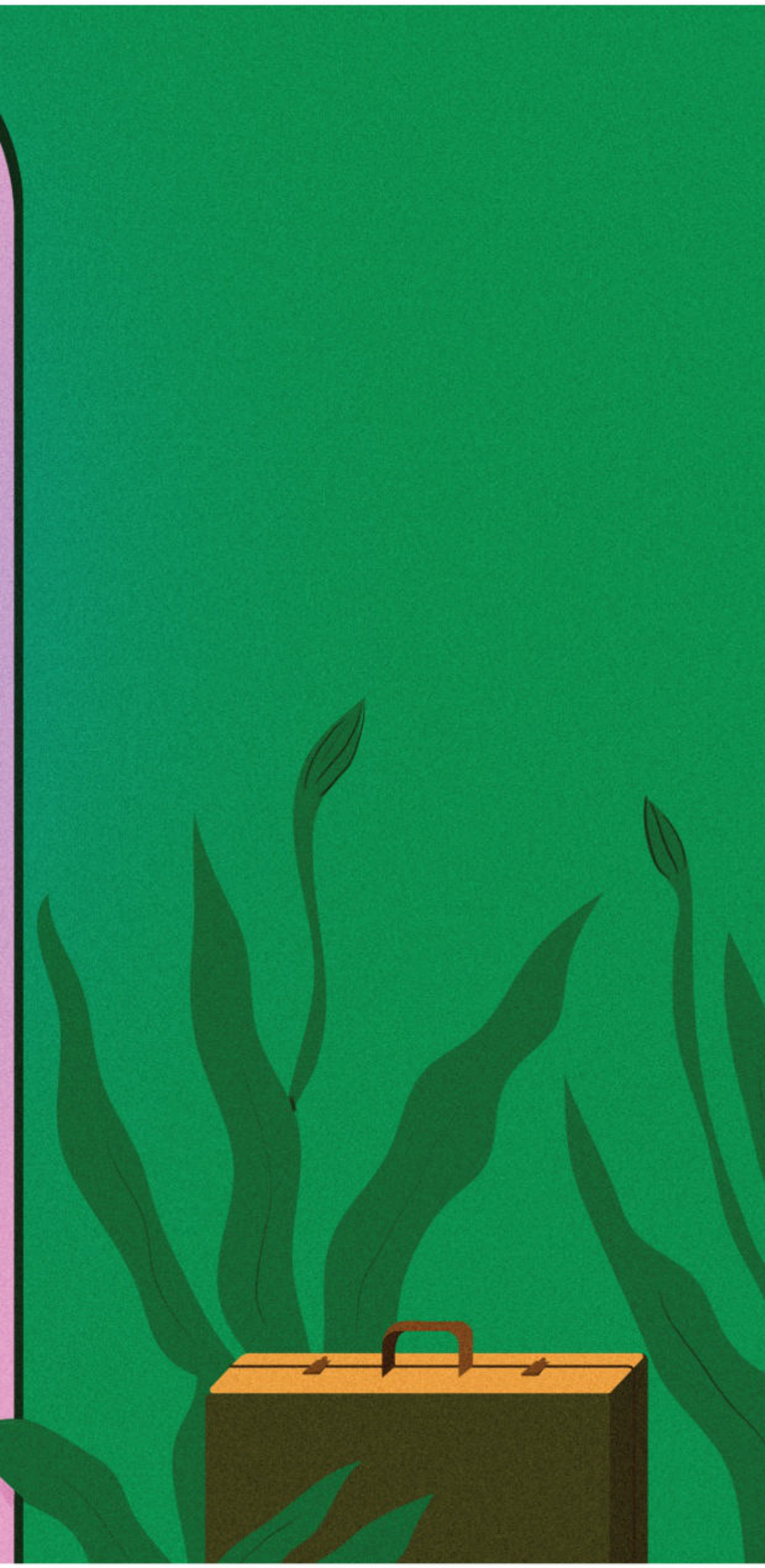
Similarly, even as social media dominates the headlines, experts are increasingly recognizing that a direct link to their fan base is the real gold. "To me, the hottest and sexiest social network right now is your inbox," blogger Chris Brogan delightfully said about email marketing. That's why one of my top goals for 2015 is doubling the size of my email list—because as audiences fragment due to the decline of mass media, you can't rely on a *Today* show appearance to "make" your brand anymore (as Rachael Ray did). You have to build a following, but increasingly that's your own responsibility.

Too many people claim to be experts. It's even more important to *be* one and ensure that the right people know it. When you've cultivated genuine expertise, shared your knowledge generously, and worked to increase the scale of your impact by reaching more people, you've become worthy of the title.

Originally published on HBR.org May 22, 2015

HBR Reprint H0238N

Dorie Clark *is a marketing strategist and keynote speaker who teaches at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and has been named one of the Top 50 business thinkers in the world by Thinkers50. Her latest book is* The Long Game: How to Be a Long-Term Thinker in a Short-Term World *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2021).*



ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY–FEBRUARY 2015

The Authenticity Paradox

Why feeling like a fake can be a sign of growth

→ by HERMINIA IBARRA

AUTHENTICITY HAS BECOME the gold standard for leadership. But a simplistic understanding of what it means can hinder your growth and limit your impact.

Consider Cynthia, a general manager in a health care organization. Her promotion into that role increased her direct reports 10-fold and expanded the range of businesses she oversaw—and she felt a little shaky about making such a big leap. A strong believer in transparent, collaborative leadership, she bared her soul to her new employees: "I want to do this job," she said, "but it's scary, and I need your help." Her candor backfired; she lost credibility with people who wanted and needed a confident leader to take charge.

Illustration by **MICHELLE D'URBANO**

Or take George, a Malaysian executive in an auto parts company where people valued a clear chain of command and made decisions by consensus. When a Dutch multinational with a matrix structure acquired the company, George found himself working with peers who saw decision making as a freewheeling contest for the best-debated ideas. That style didn't come easily to him, and it contradicted everything he had learned about humility growing up in his country. In a 360-degree debrief, his boss told him that he needed to sell his ideas and accomplishments more aggressively. George felt he had to choose between being a failure and being a fake.

Because going against our natural inclinations can make us feel like impostors, we tend to latch on to authenticity as an excuse for sticking with what's comfortable. But few jobs allow us to do that for long. That's doubly true when we advance in our careers or when demands or expectations change, as Cynthia, George, and countless other executives have discovered.

In my research on leadership transitions, I have observed that career advances require all of us to move way beyond our comfort zones. At the same time, however, they trigger a strong countervailing impulse to protect our identities: When we are unsure of ourselves or our ability to perform well or measure up in a new setting, we often retreat to familiar behaviors and styles.

But my research also demonstrates that the moments that most challenge our sense of self are the ones that can teach us the most about leading effectively. By viewing ourselves as works in progress and evolving our professional identities through trial and error, we can develop a personal style that feels right to us and suits our organizations' changing needs.

That takes courage, because learning, by definition, starts with unnatural and often superficial behaviors that can make us feel calculating instead of genuine and spontaneous. But the only way to avoid being pigeonholed and ultimately become better leaders is to do the things that a rigidly authentic sense of self would keep us from doing.

Why Leaders Struggle with Authenticity

The word "authentic" traditionally referred to any work of art that is an original, not a copy. When used to describe leadership, of course, it has other meanings—and they can be problematic. For example, the notion of adhering to one "true self" flies in the face of much research on how people evolve with experience, discovering facets of themselves they would never have unearthed through introspection alone. And being utterly transparent—disclosing every single thought and feeling—is both unrealistic and risky. (See the sidebar "What Is Authenticity?")

Leaders today struggle with authenticity for several reasons. First, we make more-frequent and more-radical changes in the kinds of work we do. As we strive to *improve* our game, a clear and firm sense of self is a compass that helps us navigate choices and progress toward our goals. But when we're looking to *change* our game, a too rigid self-concept becomes an anchor that keeps us from sailing forth, as it did at first with Cynthia.

Second, in global business, many of us work with people who don't share our cultural norms and have different expectations for how we should behave. It can often seem as if we have to choose between what is expected—and therefore effective—and what feels authentic. George is a case in point.

Third, identities are always on display in today's world of ubiquitous connectivity and social media. How we present ourselves—not just as executives but as people, with quirks and broader interests—has become an important aspect of leadership. Having to carefully curate a persona that's out there for all to see can clash with our private sense of self.

In dozens of interviews with talented executives facing new expectations, I have found that they most often grapple with authenticity in the following situations.

Taking charge in an unfamiliar role. As everyone knows, the first 90 days are critical in a new leadership role. First impressions form quickly, and they matter. Depending on their personalities, leaders respond very differently to the increased visibility and performance pressure.

Psychologist Mark Snyder, of the University of Minnesota, identified two psychological profiles that inform how leaders develop their personal styles. "High self-monitors"—or chameleons, as I call them—are naturally able and willing to adapt to the demands of a situation without feeling fake. Chameleons care about managing their public image and often mask their

"Being authentic doesn't mean that you can be held up to the light and people can see right through you."

vulnerability with bluster. They may not always get it right the first time, but they keep trying on different styles like new clothes until they find a good fit for themselves and their circumstances. Because of that flexibility, they often advance rapidly. But chameleons can run into problems when people perceive them as disingenuous or lacking a moral center—even though they're expressing their "true" chameleon nature.

By contrast, "true-to-selfers" (Snyder's "low self-monitors") tend to express what they really think and feel, even when it runs counter to situational demands. The danger with true-to-selfers like Cynthia and George is that they may stick too long with comfortable behavior that prevents them from meeting new requirements, instead of evolving their style as they gain insight and experience.

Cynthia (whom I interviewed after her story appeared in a *Wall Street Journal* article by Carol Hymowitz) hemmed herself in like this. She thought she was setting herself up for success by staying true to her highly personal, full-disclosure style of management. She asked her new team for support, openly acknowledging that she felt a bit at sea. As she scrambled to learn unfamiliar aspects of the business, she worked tirelessly to contribute to every decision and solve every problem. After a few months, she was on the verge of burnout. To make matters worse, sharing her vulnerability with her team members so early on had damaged her standing. Reflecting on her transition some years later, Cynthia told me: "Being authentic doesn't mean that you can be held up to the light and people can see right through you." But at the time, that was how she saw it—and instead of building trust, she made people question her ability to do the job.

Delegating and communicating appropriately are only part of the problem in a case like this. A deeper-seated issue is finding the right mix of distance and closeness in an unfamiliar situation. Stanford psychologist Deborah Gruenfeld describes this as managing the tension between authority and approachability. To be authoritative, you privilege your knowledge, experience, and expertise over the team's, maintaining a measure of distance. To be approachable, you emphasize your relationships with people, their input, and their perspective, and you lead with empathy and warmth. Getting the balance right presents an acute authenticity crisis for true-to-selfers, who typically have a strong preference for behaving one way or the other. Cynthia made herself too approachable and vulnerable, and it undermined and drained her. In her bigger role, she needed more distance from her employees to gain their confidence and get the job done.

Selling your ideas (and yourself). Leadership growth usually involves a shift from having good ideas to pitching them to diverse stakeholders. Inexperienced leaders, especially true-to-selfers, often find the process of getting buy-in distasteful because it feels artificial and political; they believe that their work should stand on its own merits.

Here's an example: Anne, a senior manager at a transportation company, had doubled revenue and fundamentally redesigned core processes in her unit. Despite her obvious accomplishments, however, her boss didn't consider her an inspirational leader. Anne also knew she was not communicating effectively in her role as a board member of the parent company. The chairman, a broad-brush thinker, often became impatient with her detail orientation. His feedback to her was "step up, do the vision thing." But to

Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM
When we view authenticity as an unwavering sense of self, we struggle to take on new challenges and bigger roles. The reality is that people learn—and change—who they are through experience.

THE SOLUTION
By trying out different leadership styles and behaviors, we grow more than we would through introspection alone. Experimenting with our identities allows us to find the right approach for ourselves and our organizations.

THE STICKING POINT
This adaptive approach to authenticity can make us feel like impostors, because it involves doing things that may not come naturally. But it's outside our comfort zones that we learn the most about leading effectively.

What Is Authenticity?

A too-rigid definition of authenticity can get in the way of effective leadership. Here are three examples and the problems they pose.

Being true to yourself. Which self? We have many selves, depending on the different roles that we play in life. We evolve and even transform ourselves with experience in new roles. How can you be true to a future self that is still uncertain and unformed?

Maintaining strict coherence between what you feel and what you say or do. You lose credibility and effectiveness as a leader if you disclose everything you think and feel, especially when you are unproven.

Making values-based choices. When we move into bigger roles, values that were shaped by past experiences can lead us astray. For instance, "tight control over operating details" might produce authentic but wrong-headed behavior in the face of new challenges.

Anne that seemed like valuing form over substance. "For me, it is manipulation," she told me in an interview. "I can do the storytelling too, but I refuse to play on people's emotions. If the string-pulling is too obvious, I can't make myself do it." Like many aspiring leaders, she resisted crafting emotional messages to influence and inspire others because that felt less authentic to her than relying on facts, figures, and spreadsheets. As a result, she worked at cross-purposes with the board chairman, pushing hard on the facts instead of pulling him in as a valued ally.

Many managers know deep down that their good ideas and strong potential will go unnoticed if they don't do a better job of selling themselves. Still, they can't bring themselves to do it. "I try to build a network based on professionalism and what I can deliver for the business, not who I know," one manager told me. "Maybe that's not smart from a career point of view. But I can't go against my beliefs....So I have been more limited in 'networking up.'"

Until we see career advancement as a way of extending our reach and increasing our impact in the organization—a collective win, not just a selfish pursuit—we have trouble feeling authentic when touting our strengths to influential people. True-to-selfers find it particularly hard to sell themselves to senior management when they most need to do so: when they are still unproven. Research shows, however, that this hesitancy disappears as people gain experience and become more certain of the value they bring.

Processing negative feedback. Many successful executives encounter serious negative feedback for the first time in their careers when they take on larger roles or responsibilities. Even when the criticisms aren't exactly new, they loom larger because the stakes are higher. But leaders often convince themselves that dysfunctional aspects of their "natural" style are the inevitable price of being effective.

Let's look at Jacob, a food company production manager whose direct reports gave him low marks in a 360 review on emotional intelligence, team building, and empowering others. One team member wrote that it was hard for Jacob to accept criticism. Another remarked that after an angry outburst, he'd suddenly make a joke as if nothing had happened, not realizing the destabilizing effect of his mood changes on those around him. For someone who genuinely believed that he'd built trust among his people, all this was tough to swallow.

Once the initial shock had subsided, Jacob acknowledged that this was not the first time he'd received such criticism (some colleagues and subordinates had made similar comments a few years earlier). "I thought I'd changed my approach," he reflected, "but I haven't really changed so much since the last time." However, he quickly rationalized his behavior to his boss: "Sometimes you have to be tough in order to deliver results, and people don't like it," he said. "You have to accept that as part of the job description." Of course, he was missing the point.

Because negative feedback given to leaders often centers on style rather than skills or expertise, it can feel like a threat to their identity—as if they're being asked to give up their "secret sauce." That's how Jacob saw it. Yes, he could be explosive—but from his point of view, his "toughness" allowed him to deliver results year after year. In reality, though, he had succeeded up to this point *despite* his behavior. When his role expanded and he took on greater responsibility, his intense scrutiny of subordinates became an even bigger obstacle because it took up time he should have been devoting to more-strategic pursuits.

A great public example of this phenomenon is Margaret Thatcher. Those who worked with her knew she could be merciless if someone failed to prepare as thoroughly as she did. She was capable of humiliating a staff member in public, she was a notoriously bad listener, and she believed that compromise was cowardice. As she became known to the world as the "Iron Lady," Thatcher grew more and more convinced of the rightness of her ideas and the necessity of her coercive methods. She could beat anyone into submission with the power of her rhetoric and conviction, and she only got better at it. Eventually, though, it was her undoing—she was ousted by her own cabinet.

A Playful Frame of Mind

Such a rigid self-concept can result from too much introspection. When we look only within for answers, we inadvertently reinforce old ways of seeing the world and outdated views of ourselves. Without the benefit of what I call outsight—the valuable external perspective we get from experimenting with new leadership behaviors—habitual patterns of thought and action fence us in. To begin thinking like leaders, we must first act: plunge ourselves into new projects and activities, interact with very different kinds of people, and experiment with new ways of getting things done. Especially in times of transition and uncertainty, thinking and introspection should follow experience—not vice versa. Action changes who we are and what we believe is worth doing.

Fortunately, there are ways of increasing outsight and evolving toward an "adaptively authentic" way of leading, but they require a playful frame of mind. Think of leadership development as trying on possible selves rather than working on yourself—which, let's face it, sounds like drudgery. When we adopt a playful attitude, we're more open to possibilities. It's OK to be inconsistent from one day to the next. That's not being a fake; it's how we experiment to figure out what's right for the new challenges and circumstances we face.

My research suggests three important ways to get started:

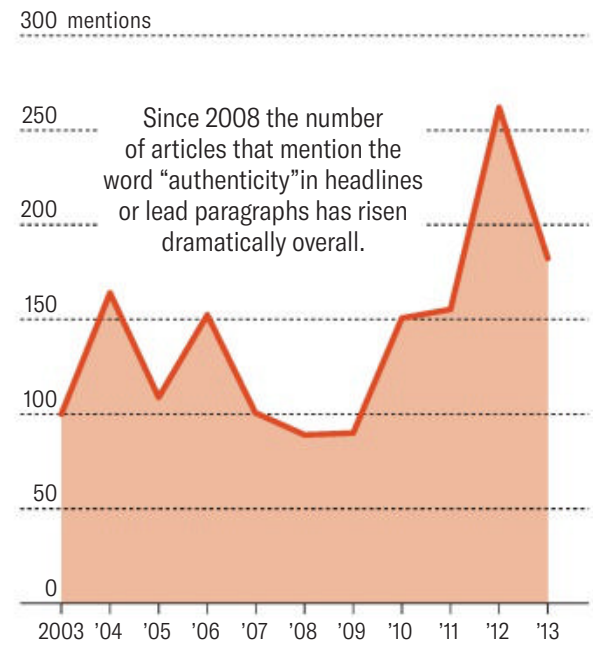
Learn from diverse role models. Most learning necessarily involves some form of imitation—and the understanding that nothing is "original." An important part of growing as a leader is viewing authenticity not as an intrinsic state but as the ability to take elements you have learned from others' styles and behaviors and make them your own.

But don't copy just one person's leadership style; tap many diverse role models. There is a big difference between imitating someone wholesale and borrowing selectively from various people to create your own collage, which you then modify and improve. As the playwright Wilson Mizner said, copying one author is plagiarism, but copying many is research.

I observed the importance of this approach in a study of investment bankers and consultants who were advancing from analytical and project work to roles advising clients and selling new business. Though most of them felt incompetent and insecure in their new positions, the chameleons among

Why Companies Are Pushing Authenticity Training

Number of articles that mention the word "authenticity" in the headlines or lead paragraphs



Sources: New York Times, Financial Times, Washington Post, Economist, Wall Street Journal, and HBR

Managers can choose from countless books, articles, and executive workshops for advice on how to be more authentic at work. Two trends help explain the exploding popularity of the concept and the training industry it has fed.

First, trust in business leaders fell to an all-time low in 2012, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer. Even in 2013, when trust began to climb back up, only 18% of people reported that they trusted business leaders to tell the truth, and fewer than half trusted businesses to do the right thing.

Second, employee engagement is at a nadir. A 2013 Gallup poll found that only 13% of employees worldwide are engaged at work. Only one in eight workers—out of roughly 180 million employees studied—is psychologically committed to his or her job. In study after study, frustration, burnout, disillusionment, and misalignment with personal values are cited among the biggest reasons for career change.

At a time when public confidence and employee morale are so low, it's no surprise that companies are encouraging leaders to discover their "true" selves.

them consciously borrowed styles and tactics from successful senior leaders—learning through emulation how to use humor to break tension in meetings, for instance, and how to shape opinion without being overbearing. Essentially, the chameleons faked it until they found what worked for them. Noticing their efforts, their managers provided coaching and mentoring and shared tacit knowledge.

As a result, the chameleons arrived much faster at an authentic but more skillful style than the true-to-selfers in the study, who continued to focus solely on demonstrating technical mastery. Often the true-to-selfers concluded that their managers were "all talk and little content" and therefore not suitable role models. In the absence of a "perfect" model they had a harder time with imitation—it felt bogus. Unfortunately, their managers perceived their inability to adapt as a lack of effort or investment and thus didn't give them as much mentoring and coaching as they gave the chameleons.

Work on getting better. Setting goals for learning (not just for performance) helps us experiment with our identities without feeling like impostors, because we don't expect to get everything right from the start. We stop trying to protect our comfortable old selves from the threats that change can bring, and start exploring what kinds of leaders we might become.

Of course, we all want to perform well in a new situation—get the right strategy in place, execute like crazy, deliver results the organization cares about. But focusing exclusively on those things makes us afraid to take risks in the service of learning. In a series of ingenious experiments, Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck has shown that concern about how we will appear to others inhibits learning on new or unfamiliar tasks. Performance goals motivate us to show others that we possess valued attributes, such as intelligence and social skill, and to prove to ourselves that we have them. By contrast, learning goals motivate us to develop valued attributes.

When we're in performance mode, leadership is about presenting ourselves in the most favorable light. In learning mode, we can reconcile our yearning for authenticity in how we work and lead with an equally powerful desire to grow. One leader I met was highly effective in small-group settings but struggled to convey openness to new ideas in larger meetings, where he often stuck to long-winded presentations for fear of getting derailed by others' comments. He set himself a "no PowerPoint" rule to develop a more relaxed, improvisational style. He surprised himself by how much he learned, not only about his own evolving preferences but also about the issues at hand.

Don't stick to "your story." Most of us have personal narratives about defin-

The Cultural Factor

Whatever the situation—taking charge in unfamiliar territory, selling your ideas and yourself, or processing negative feedback—finding authentic ways of being effective is even more difficult in a multicultural environment.

As my INSEAD colleague Erin Meyer finds in her research, styles of persuading others and the kinds of arguments that people find persuasive are far from universal; they are deeply rooted in a culture's philosophical, religious, and educational assumptions. That said, prescriptions for how leaders are supposed to look and sound are rarely as diverse as the leaders themselves. And despite corporate initiatives to build understanding of cultural differences and promote diversity, the fact is that leaders are still expected to express ideas assertively, to claim credit for them, and to use charisma to motivate and inspire people.

Authenticity is supposed to be an antidote to a single model of leadership. (After all, the message is to be yourself, not what someone else expects you to be.) But as the notion has gained currency, it has, ironically, come to mean something much more limiting and culturally specific. A closer look at how leaders are taught to discover and demonstrate authenticity—by telling a personal story about a hardship they have overcome, for example—reveals a model that is, in fact, very American, based on ideals such as self-disclosure, humility, and individualistic triumph over adversity.

This amounts to a catch-22 for managers from cultures with different norms for authority, communication, and collective endeavor because they must behave inauthentically in order to conform to the strictures of "authentic" leadership.

Try out new stories about yourself, and keep editing them, much as you would your résumé.

ing moments that taught us important lessons. Consciously or not, we allow our stories, and the images of ourselves that they paint, to guide us in new situations. But the stories can become outdated as we grow, so sometimes it's necessary to alter them dramatically or even to throw them out and start from scratch.

That was true for Maria, a leader who saw herself as a "mother hen with her chicks all around." Her coach, former Ogilvy & Mather CEO Charlotte Beers, explains in *I'd Rather Be in Charge* that this self-image emerged from a time when Maria had to sacrifice her own goals and dreams to take care of her extended family. It eventually began to hold her back in her career: Though it had worked for her as a friendly and loyal team player and a peacekeeper, it wasn't helping her get the big leadership assignment she wanted. Together Maria and her coach looked for another defining moment to use as a touchstone—one that was more in keeping with Maria's desired future self, not who she had been in the past. They chose the time when Maria, as a young woman, had left her family to travel the world for 18 months. Acting from that bolder sense of self, she asked for—and got—a promotion that had previously been elusive.

Dan McAdams, a Northwestern psychology professor who has spent his career studying life stories, describes identity as "the internalized and evolving story that results from a person's selective appropriation of past, present and future." This isn't just academic jargon. McAdams is saying that you have to believe your story—but also embrace how it changes over time, according to what you need it to do. Try out new stories about yourself, and keep editing them, much as you would your résumé.

Again, revising one's story is both an introspective and a social process. The narratives we choose should not only sum up our experiences and aspirations but also reflect the demands we face and resonate with the audience we're trying to win over.

COUNTLESS BOOKS AND ADVISERS tell you to start your leadership journey with a clear sense of who you are. But that can be a recipe for staying stuck in the past. Your leadership identity can and should change each time you move on to bigger and better things.

The only way we grow as leaders is by stretching the limits of who we are—doing new things that make us uncomfortable but that teach us through direct experience who we want to become. Such growth doesn't require a radical personality makeover. Small changes—in the way we carry ourselves, the way we communicate, the way we interact—often make a world of difference in how effectively we lead.

HBR Reprint R1501C

Herminia Ibarra *is the Charles Handy Professor of Organisational Behaviour at London Business School. She is the author of* Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader *and* Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing your Career *(HBR Press, second editions, forthcoming 2023).*

ORIGINALLY AIRED ON *WOMEN AT WORK* FEBRUARY 09, 2018

Lead with Authenticity

Why feeling like yourself at work can be tricky. A conversation with Tina Opie and Candice Morgan

→hosted by AMY BERNSTEIN, SARAH GREEN CARMICHAEL, and NICOLE TORRES

SARAH GREEN CARMICHAEL: I once worked with a woman who was pulled aside by our boss, who told her, "You have a lot of potential. I can see you moving into management. But if you want to do that, you need to dress differently and you should start wearing makeup."

Everyone in this case was a woman, but my peer who'd been given this advice was furious. "That is so sexist. I can't believe she would say that I have to wear makeup to get ahead in this company." Is it sexist to give someone that kind of advice?

TINA OPIE: We have to differentiate between how we want the world to be and how the world actually is. I would like that advice to never be uttered, because how you dress shouldn't matter as long as you're doing a good job. That's the kind of world I want to live in and that I've dedicated my research and teaching toward building.

But unfortunately, that is not the world in which we live. Appearance is highly connected to impressions, which matter. Humans automatically categorize other people: This kind of person

Illustration by MICHELLE D'URBANO

is going to be more professional. This kind of person is not going to be. If you happen to fall into the latter category, you may have some additional work that you have to do to demonstrate that you are, in fact, fierce, professional, and amazing.

AMY BERNSTEIN: My brilliant and wise mother was an advertising executive when I graduated from college with a wardrobe that consisted of two pairs of blue jeans and three button-down shirts. She took me shopping before I started my first job and made me buy a straight skirt and a nice jacket and a nice blouse.

If you had dressed me in a Superman outfit, I could not have felt more uncomfortable and less authentic. But her advice to me was if you want to be the vice president eventually, dress like the vice president. All these years later I think about that, because it was excellent advice to someone who didn't understand what being authentic in the new context would be.

OPIE: What your mother did was provide you with a uniform. As professionals, we don't like to think of ourselves having to wear uniforms. This is a little classist: In our minds, we're above that; it's for other people to have to wear uniforms.

But the business suit is, in fact, a uniform. It's very Eurocentric and masculine, comes from royal court, and was a way to differentiate the classes from each other and, eventually, to show modesty. While the suits were initially brilliant in color—reds and purples—over time they were toned down to what we now have: navies, blacks, grays, and other subdued, subtle colors, because that conveyed a certain level of professionalism and trustworthiness.

Your mother was extending to you the same kind of uniform. If you had shown up with those jeans and one of those button-down shirts, you probably would've been embarrassed when you got there, because no one else would've been attired that way.

But right now I have on jeggings, a nice floral top, and some cute earrings, and my hair is up in a puff. I hope to run a corporation where I can be the CEO and be dressed exactly this way. And I dare anybody to come in there and tell me I'm unprofessional.

BERNSTEIN: Can I sit and watch?
[Laughter]

OPIE: And if someone is more comfortable in a business suit, I want them to feel comfortable wearing that, too!

BERNSTEIN: Has a student ever asked you for advice about how to dress for a job interview?

OPIE: I was doing a workshop on authenticity in the workplace at Babson, and one of my students asked, "Do you think it's OK if I wear my hair natural to the workplace?" I asked her if she liked her natural hair and wanted to wear it that way. "Yes, it makes me feel good as a Black Latina woman." How she wore her hair was connected to her authenticity and her identity.

I asked her what career she was interested in. "I want to go into law." What kind of environment did she think she was going to confront in the legal profession? "Well, they're very conservative, tailored suits." (Women's business attire was very much created to replicate men's business attire. Women's uniforms in the workplace were designed to cover up their femininity and their differences.)

Here comes the difficult part: People would like there to be a clear-cut answer, but there isn't one.

I told my student that she had to weigh the consequences. Understand that if you walk into this particular context with natural hair, it may mean that you don't get the next job interview or you don't get the assignments you want.

In research I've conducted with Kathy Phillips we've found that images of people with Afrocentric hair were rated as less professional than the same images of women when they were portrayed as having straight, relaxed hair. (Not all women of African descent have the same textured hair, to be clear—I don't want to just lump people together.)

These ratings were made by both Black and white people, but having Afrocentric hair was actually most denigrated by people of African descent. When we asked questions like "What advice would you give to this candidate?" no one mentioned anything about hair when they were looking at the people with straight hair. But when Black people in particular were rating the images with Afros or dreadlocks, they said things like: "She might need to change her hairstyle." "She might need to straighten her hair." "She might need to relax her hair." I think that's because that's probably advice they've received.

"I want to get to a place where we can all bring how we authentically identify ourselves to the workplace and for our colleagues to embrace that rather than trying to get us to conform."

But straightening and grooming your hair daily takes time if it is naturally textured. That's a lot of uncompensated work that you have to do outside of the workplace. And if you feel that any option other than keeping your hair natural would mean that you're getting rid of that visible evidence of your Africanness or your Blackness and conforming to the point that you're uncomfortable or feel bad about yourself, then perhaps that's not the best environment for you.

Admittedly, this is a very privileged comment to make, because if you have to pay your bills, you're going to do what it takes: straightening your hair, covering up your tattoo, or getting rid of your piercings.

Similarly, there are instances of people who are willing to change their names, specifically in the Asian community. I have many students who will say, "Just call me Amy." I want to call them by the name that's on their birth certificate, but for them that is uncomfortable because it highlights their Asianness.

But I want to get to a place where we are all able to bring how we authentically identify and describe ourselves to the workforce and for our colleagues to embrace that rather than trying to get us to conform.

BERNSTEIN: What about the ways we express ourselves? I'm pretty direct, and I get called out on that occasionally. In a polite culture, like ours at HBR, it can be misinterpreted as being angry or being rude when all you're really trying to do is be clear. Plus I'm a New Yorker. It's in my DNA.

OPIE: As a woman in the workplace, I have been slapped on the wrist for being too direct. But I've also tried to figure out how to work around that by saying to someone who has asked me a question, "Do you want to hear the truth? Or do you want me to just say something to sort of appease the situation?"

I'd like to adjust the culture so that kind directness is valued. Indirectness doesn't necessarily have a kind intention behind it: The person may not want to hurt your feelings, but they also aren't very invested in helping you understand or improve.

CARMICHAEL: My background is a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant New Englander, and my family is not direct. It's really hard to even make plans at the holidays because no one will just say what they would prefer to do. So in the workplace I've always struggled with how I can be indirect, but clear and nice, versus what feels to me like being direct and clear, but mean.

BERNSTEIN: Just add an exclamation point to the email.

CARMICHAEL: Right. And a smiley face. *[Laughter]*

NICOLE TORRES: My family is very indirect. We're suppressors of emotion. We seethe if we're sad or angry. It was not a very emotional household, and I think that I am not a superemotional person. And when I come into work, I don't consider myself very indirect, but I do think I'm very polite in my emails in a way that makes asking for things

Idea in Brief

PROBLEM
In an ideal world, how you express yourself—through appearance, manner, and delivery—shouldn't matter as long as you're doing a good job. But in the real world, impressions have an impact, and for women it can be especially tricky to balance being authentic with achieving professional success. How do we comfortably reflect our true identities and still convey our professionalism?

VIEWPOINTS
Authenticity expert Tina Opie and DEI professional Candice Morgan explore the conundrum of bringing our authentic selves to the workplace. Opie explains that while there are no simple answers, understanding your own values, being realistic about others' reactions, and weighing the trade-offs is a way to begin. Morgan draws on her experience of uncovering bias and stereotypes at Pinterest to show how leaders can work toward a systemic solution for creating belonging in the workplace. The three hosts, meanwhile, share their experiences of anxiety in new roles—and the determination with which they were able to succeed.

a challenge: "This will be a great idea; this is great for both of us..."

CARMICHAEL: You are maybe the most polite person in our office.

TORRES: I'm very polite. I love exclamation points! I want people to feel my positive energy going to them. I think that's internalized from growing up and not really getting to be angry or getting to show anger or even be direct, to ask for things directly.

OPIE: So I'm putting you on the spot, Nicole. Do you identify as Asian?

TORRES: Uh-huh.

OPIE: I asked Nicole if she identified as Asian because there are stereotypes. And in the workplace, one of the things that's interesting...so Asian people are known as model minorities: super-polite, will get the work done, focus on the task, but they're not leaders. Have you heard that stereotype before?

TORRES: Oh, yeah. We published research on that.

OPIE: When you said you're not emotional, is it that you don't feel the emotions? Or that you don't want to express the emotion?

TORRES: I feel these emotions. Not knowing how to express them—or not knowing what's appropriate to express—is a big question that I think about subconsciously. I think it is cultural and comes from the norms of my household growing up (do well in school, don't talk back, get good grades, don't cause a fuss), which are very different from the path I envision for myself now, trying to be heard and to lead.

OPIE: Once you get into the workplace, if you want to express your emotions but you feel like you don't know how to because of your cultural upbringing, that's one thing. But if you feel like you have to suppress emotion because the workplace is forcing you to do that, then that's still inauthentic.

BERNSTEIN: Herminia Ibarra wrote a great article, "The Authenticity Paradox" (HBR, January–February 2015; also in this issue), and one of the points she made that resonated for me was that when you think about authenticity, particularly for someone who's closer to the beginning of her career—like you, Nicole—you have to try on different personas to see which one feels comfortable. The person who graduated from college a few years ago probably isn't going to be the one who thrives in any workplace. You learn, you grow, you figure it out. You bump into a few things; you find the right way forward for yourself.

CARMICHAEL: In a previous episode we talked about how women can be heard more in meetings, and that included, instead of saying, "Well, how about this?" saying, "My strong recommendation is this." And one of the conversations we had is does it feel inauthentic when you are consciously trying to change the way that you talk in order to be heard?

OPIE: When we encourage and counsel women to say "my strong recommendation is," is that just good, general career advice, or are we asking women to conform? If they're communicating their brilliant ideas, do they need to communicate in a particular way?

TORRES: When I got my nose pierced and I told my mom, she almost fainted. She flipped out and said, "You're never going to get a job with that." And my thinking was, Well, I don't want to work anywhere where that's not OK. Is that a Millennial attitude? I know that's kind of a privileged attitude. I can pick where I'm going to go. But I wonder if that is a different mentality associated with younger generations.

OPIE: I think every generation has had the desire to rebel. It might have been, "Well, I have on this pinstriped suit, but I have on yellow socks." Or, "I have on this tailored suit, but I have tattoos on my arm that they'll never see." Or, "My hair is in a bun, but really it's dreadlocks."

BERNSTEIN: I also think that as a non-Millennial by many years, it makes me really happy that you feel comfortable coming in. I actually had forgotten that you have a pierced nose.

OPIE: I do wonder though, if you were a Black woman with dreadlocks and a pierced nose and pink hair, if it would be acceptable. Because it's sort of, like, maybe we can venture out in one or two ways, but don't come in here totally nonconformist. That's not going to be accepted.

"The less power you have, the more challenging it can be to be authentic, period."

CARMICHAEL: To sort of put a point on it, do you think that it is possible for a woman to be a truly authentic leader? And if it is possible, is it only true for some women?

OPIE: I do think it's possible for women to be authentic leaders. That's because authenticity to me isn't as much someone who is always honest and transparent as instead someone who is pursuing their best self.

That person will take the perspectives of people who follow them into consideration when making decisions. I don't think it's necessarily limited to certain kinds of women, but I do think that it is harder for women than men.

The less power you have, the more challenging it can be to be authentic, period. If you're a person who is an hourly worker who is really dependent upon your employer, if they tell you to wear an apron and straighten your hair, you may be more inclined to do that than if you are the CEO of an organization.

TORRES: Candice Morgan used to work for a global nonprofit whose mission was to improve work for women. But she left in January 2016 to join Pinterest as their head of inclusion and diversity. When she got to Silicon Valley, she started wondering whether her style was too corporate for the tech industry.

As an expert in identity and interpersonal relationships, she knew what that feeling was—that new-employee fear of not fitting in. It's called *belonging uncertainty*.

In tech, women often have a higher belonging uncertainty in the first few weeks of their jobs than men. Part of that can come from being underrepresented—that's why she's helping the company improve its diversity rates—but she says that the culture has to go beyond hiring more female engineers and people from underrepresented ethnic groups. So I asked Candice to tell me more about what she's doing to promote authenticity at Pinterest.

CANDICE MORGAN: First, even though we find that women are more likely to report belonging uncertainty, men experience it too. Anytime, whether it's your first job or your 10th job, you're going to wonder if you share the values of the organization around you.

So within people's first week in the company, as part of their orientation, we highlight belonging uncertainty a few times to normalize it. In our session on unconscious bias that's usually held on your fourth day at the company, we introduce how to create feelings of belonging more broadly and we acknowledge that the people around the table may be feeling some uncertainty and that's OK. Impostor syndrome and feelings like that are completely valid and normal.

We also think about authenticity during the performance review process. When we evaluate people, that's when we can see them wondering, *Do I need to be a certain type of person to be successful at this company?* And we want to make sure that people of different styles have a fair shot at becoming leaders and having their accomplishments recognized.

So we created a moment within the performance review discussion in which we talk about potential biases—the way styles or whether you're an introvert or extrovert could skew the results. We talk about, for example, types of words that tend to be used differently. For example, people view the word "helpful" differently depending on gender: If a woman is helpful, it's expected; if a man is helpful, it could be seen as an extra, even though they're demonstrating the same behavior. That goes back to gender stereotypes.

Similarly, the word "aggressive" can be viewed very differently, not only along gender lines but along racial lines. We call out those words as people are talking about performance. And if we're giving feedback, especially if it's stylistic feedback, we ask ourselves if it's actually valid.

TORRES: One thing that always comes up when we talk about women in tech is this issue of a leaky pipeline, how women tend to leave the field at each career stage, especially at the higher levels. But 45% of Pinterest's workforce are women. What are you doing to keep these female employees engaged?

MORGAN: We actually look at retention in terms of a metric and in terms of an outcome. We can see the retention rates of women of certain underrepresented ethnic minority groups and across things like age.

But by the time you're looking at that metric, you may be too late. So we also think about what engages employees the most. Well, interestingly enough, it goes back to belonging. So we added

"It's about shutting down that stupid voice in your head that tells you you're not good enough, you're not worthy. Tell that jerk to shut up, and be yourself."

an element to our employee survey around "I feel like I belong at Pinterest." And it turns out the way people respond to that question is one of the biggest indicators of their engagement at the company.

TORRES: So have you figured out the women and authenticity question in your own life then?

MORGAN: It's a work in progress. On a very local level, there are small ways all the time that I'm being more authentic than I ever have been at work. For example, I am a huge fan of natural hairstyles, although my execution isn't always perfect. And so I'm finding myself experimenting with different hairstyles at work. That's powerful because recently a woman joined a team adjacent to me who also has natural hair and had previously worked in an environment where she didn't feel she could wear her hair natural. People are able to speak in different types of vernaculars, and that's OK.

TORRES: So Amy, Sarah, when I got off the phone with Candice, I couldn't help but think about this idea of belonging uncertainty—how it's something everyone experiences when they join a company for the first time. When I started at HBR, I definitely felt that fear of whether I would fit in or not. I moved here from New York. I was much younger than many people that I was going to be working with; I was the youngest person on my team. I used to wear crazy trousers all the time at work, and I got here and there were no crazy trousers. So I stopped doing that.

CARMICHAEL: Oh, no. I miss your crazy trousers. I loved them!

TORRES: This question of "Do I belong here in this organization?" definitely struck a chord for me. Have either of you had that experience? And if so, what did you do to get more comfortable?

BERNSTEIN: I have had it everywhere I've ever worked, and that's a lot of places. When I joined HBR, I came in as the editor and I had that kind of blinding moment of panic: *Oh my God, what if they don't like me? What if I don't fit in? What if this is a terrible mistake?*

Then I realized it was an act of will to make sure that didn't happen. So much of what goes on in that moment is that feeling of desperation. *Please like me.* And there's very little to like about "please like me" in desperation. So the act of will is finding a way to put that out of your head and bringing your best self to work—and figuring out who that is.

I remember my first day: Adi, our boss, called a big meeting, and I walked into the biggest conference room in the office and I was introduced to what seemed like 90 people who were all named Sarah or Jeff, and there was Adi, who interviewed me, and there was a moment when I thought, *I don't even remember my name.* I had to find a way to put that out of my brain and just be there. It's about shutting down that stupid voice in your head that tells you you're not good enough, you're not worthy. Tell that jerk to shut up, and be yourself. And that has always worked for me.

CARMICHAEL: I've always felt super at home in this organization. Maybe that's also why I've been here for so long!

But before I joined HBR, I was a sportswriter and I was one of a few lady sportswriters in Boston, and there were lots of people who were totally willing to tell me that I did not belong. And I just thought, *Those people are full of it*. I feel like it's a mark of my privilege to say while there have been times I have been sometimes daunted by the challenges, I haven't ever looked around and wondered if I belong at this company.

BERNSTEIN: But you have the gift of not believing all the negative stuff that comes your way, and a lot of people don't have that.

CARMICHAEL: I believe the negative stuff I tell myself about myself. But I do have a very good gift at not believing the crappy things other people say to me about myself.

BERNSTEIN: Do not underestimate the value of that gift. It's huge.

TORRES: I've been here for four years now, and I'm less worried about whether I fit in or not, but I started thinking more about this other inflection point that Candice touched on, which is that you're starting to worry less about fitting in and you're thinking more about whether you stand out enough to be a leader, to get to the next level of your career. Is this

a point that either of you have experienced?

BERNSTEIN: I remember when someone first said to me something about my executive presence and I just started laughing. I thought that was such a weird idea, and then I understood what she was talking about.

Sarah, you got a promotion recently. Part of the reason, I think, is you are a strong presence. You have great ideas, and you make them heard. You're impossible to ignore. That's a part of what we're talking about here. And it's something that you have to grow into.

CARMICHAEL: It seems like there's an arc here: In the beginning, you worry about fitting in and blending in, and then you realize that you have to stand out to some degree to get the credit for your work to make sure that people see you as someone with the potential to be in a leadership role.

Then once you're in the leadership role, you have to go back to blending in, because now you can't. Instead you have to worry more about making it safe for other people to speak and giving credit to the right people—it's more like standing back.

BERNSTEIN: If I were your manager and knew that you were worried about fitting in, I would work to create an environment where you didn't have to worry about that—where you would feel that your differences were a credit to you. To me, that says something more about the environment than it says about you.

TORRES: I also think being authentic means, for me, also being open about what I still need to learn.

BERNSTEIN: That's such a great point. Instead of writhing in the agony of what you don't know, figure out what to learn and go talk to your boss: "I realize there's a lot I have to learn here. I'm thinking of starting with this. What do you think?" Get some feedback and get some guidance.

CARMICHAEL: In those moments when I feel uncomfortable, it's so tempting to say, "This just isn't me." To keep myself focused on learning, one of the things that I've tried to say to myself instead is, "This just isn't me *yet*." And that keeps me focused on getting better rather than being perfect.

Season 1, episode 3 of Women at Work *originally aired on February 9, 2018. This transcript has been edited for clarity and length.*

Amy Bernstein *is the editor of* Harvard Business Review *and a host of the* Women at Work *podcast.* ***Sarah Green Carmichael*** *is a* Bloomberg Opinion *editor and a former executive editor at* Harvard Business Review, *where she was a host of the* Women at Work *podcast.* ***Nicole Torres*** *is the deputy editor of* Bloomberg Opinion Europe *and a former senior editor at* Harvard Business Review, *where she was a host of the* Women at Work *podcast.* ***Tina Opie*** *is an associate professor of management at Babson College and the coauthor of* Shared Sisterhood *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2022).* ***Candice Morgan*** *is a partner and the head of equity, diversity, and inclusion at GV and the former head of inclusion and diversity at Pinterest.*

Quick Takes

YULIA REZNIKOV/GETTY IMAGES

1. The Authenticity Trap for Workers Who Are Not Straight White Men

→ by SYLVIA ANN HEWLETT

MANY EMPLOYEES ARE encouraged to "just be yourself," only to find their authenticity—and their career ambitions—constrained by unwritten office rules about appearance, speech, and behavior. Professionals of color, women, and people who identify as LGBT find there is a much narrower band of acceptance, and the constraints bite harder than wearing more-polished outfits, getting a decent haircut, or even deemphasizing an accent. Because senior leaders are overwhelmingly "pale and male"—professionals of color hold only 11% of executive positions in corporate America, women currently make up just 5% of *Fortune* 500 CEOs, and there are even fewer openly gay chief executives—they often feel they have to scrub themselves of the ethnic, religious, racial, socioeconomic, and educational identifiers that make them who they *really* are.

As I explain in my new book, *Executive Presence: The Missing Link Between Merit and Success,* performance, hard work, and sponsors may get top talent recognized and promoted, but leadership potential alone isn't enough to boost even the most qualified men and women into top jobs and prime opportunities. Moving up in an organization depends on looking and acting like a leader, on being perceived as having "executive presence" (EP). According to research from the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), EP constitutes 26% of what senior leaders say it takes to get to the next promotion. But what if conforming to your organization's definition of EP clashes with your sense of self?

CTI research found that 41% of professionals of color felt they needed to compromise their authenticity to conform to EP standards at their company. Respondents of Asian descent were afflicted the most—particularly Asian men. Among women of color, Hispanics were the most likely to say they'd sacrificed authenticity to conform. And, according to CTI's recent research into women in science, engineering, and technology, women in these male-dominated industries feel they have to change

The authenticity conundrum can be solved by enabling others to recognize the value that your difference brings.

the way they communicate, dress, and behave in meetings to survive in a testosterone-suffused environment. Some 41% of LGBT respondents are not out at work, and 23% of men and 15% of women believe that passing—pretending to be in a heterosexual relationship; changing their mannerisms, voice, or clothing; or hiding LGBT friendships—has helped their career.

Walling off parts of your life can cost you not only personally but also professionally. Ray, an African American accountant, didn't feel comfortable sharing his strong ties to his church and community because he feared it would undermine the impression that he was like everyone else at his firm. Because of his decision to "hide," he says, he found himself excluded from high-profile teams and projects, even though he had twice the experience of some of his colleagues. "It's a case of the invisible man," he explains. "The less you get to be yourself, the less likely others are to remember you for high-visibility assignments, and the less visible you will indeed become."

This vicious circle has serious ramifications for engagement and retention. More than half of closeted LGBT workers we surveyed told us they feel stalled in their careers, compared with 36% of gay employees who are out at work. They're more disengaged, too: They were 73% more likely than their out counterparts to say they intended to leave their firm within three years.

If you want to be perceived as leadership material, do you suppress your difference or embrace it? Is assimilation a smart career strategy or a sellout, a compromise to your authenticity or just a compromise?

In deciphering the "hows" and "whys" as well as the "dos and "don'ts" of lifting up your authenticity in the workplace, consider how the landscape for multicultural professionals is shifting. As our economy grows ever more globalized and competition for market share intensifies, companies are under ever-greater pressure to innovate—both to retain market share and to capture new markets in emerging economies and underserved markets. New CTI research reveals that your inherent difference can make you a valuable asset to teams—and leaders—who can benefit from the unique perspective that difference confers.

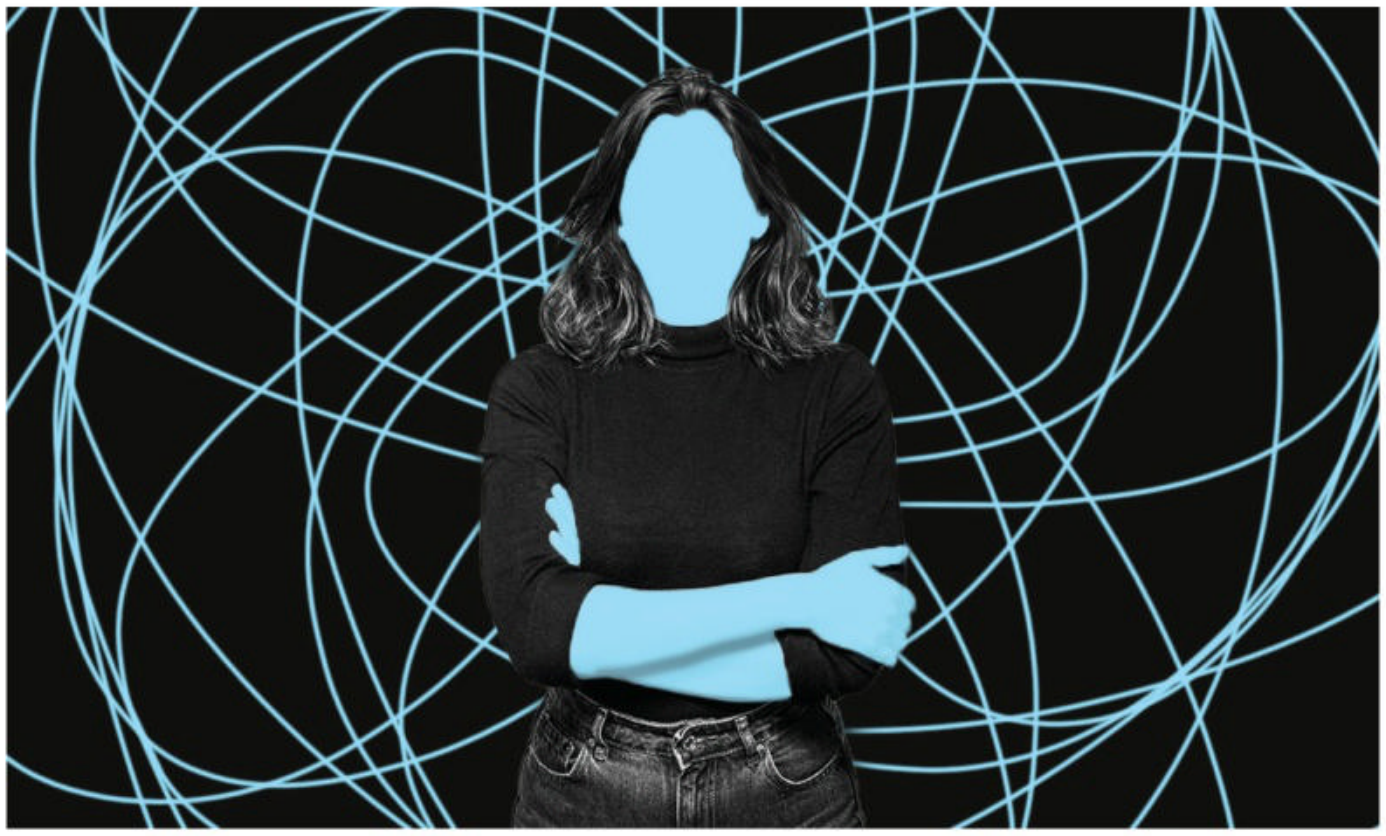
The CTI research shows that an inherently diverse team—one that includes members who are female, nonwhite or of non-European origin, or LGBT—boosts the team's innovative potential by providing critical insights into the unmet needs and wants of overlooked or underserved end users like themselves. For example, at Standard Chartered in India, one female executive drove the transformation of two bank branches in Kolkata and New Delhi into all-women branches, a move that increased net sales at these branches by an impressive 127% and 75%, respectively, from 2009 to 2010. (This compared with a paltry 48% average among the bank's other 90-plus Indian branches.) In addition, at Morgan Stanley, one openly gay financial adviser spearheaded an accreditation campaign in domestic-partner estate planning that won the firm some $120 million in client assets because affluent members of the LGBT community preferred to work with financial advisers who understood their unique predicament.

Ultimately, the authenticity conundrum can be solved by enabling others to recognize the value that your difference brings. Leveraging your unique understanding and vital insight can help solve intractable problems or realize unfulfilled market potential. In today's hypercompetitive world, the organization absolutely needs you to bring your whole self to work. By proving that diversity can pay big dividends, you can also demonstrate why it's OK to "just be yourself."

Originally published on HBR.org July 17, 2014

HBR Reprint H00WRL

Sylvia Ann Hewlett *is an economist and the CEO of Hewlett Consulting Partners, as well as the founder and chair emeritus of the COQUAL. She is the award-winning author of 17 critically acclaimed books, including* When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children *(Basic Books, 1991),* Executive Presence: The Missing Link Between Merit and Success *(Harper Business, 2014), and* The Sponsor Effect: How to Be a Better Leader by Investing in Others *(Harvard Business Review Press, 2019). Hewlett has taught at Cambridge, Columbia, and Princeton universities and has appeared on* 60 Minutes, Morning Joe, Today, *and* Saturday Night Live.



2. Gravitas Is a Quality You Can Develop

→ by REBECCA NEWTON

"REBECCA, I NEED more gravitas," Andreas said to me at the start of our first coaching session, "but I want to be myself. I don't want to pretend to be someone else."

As an organizational psychologist at the London School of Economics, teaching leadership development in executive education programs and coaching professionals globally for 20 years, I've had the privilege of hearing the development goals of hundreds of professionals. They regularly describe wanting to be valued and respected—but they fear that to do so, they need to betray their own personality or values.

Having gravitas at work means you are taken seriously, your contributions are considered important, and you are trusted and respected. Gravitas increases your ability to persuade and influence and will probably fuel the extent to which you rise in an organization. The organization also benefits: You're more likely to add value if your voice is taken seriously.

It's easy to associate gravitas with behaviors that fit a particular mold—what I call "surface gravitas." Generally this involves posturing, dominance, or self-importance that is meant to charm or subdue. Taken to an extreme these behaviors can be counterproductive, eroding your relationships and influence, and even contributing to fear-based cultures that are anathema to innovation.

But even when it's approached with the best of intentions, building gravitas by simply putting on an outward appearance can be harmful. Research suggests that authenticity—understanding your real self, including your deep-level and conscious thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and values, and acting in a way that reflects those—may be one of the strongest predictors of well-being. Many people sense this intuitively and shy away from trying to build their gravitas at all, assuming that if you're not born with it, you can't acquire it.

But in my work and research I've seen that you *can* develop your gravitas while being true to yourself. The key is understanding that your real self can change as you build a deeper set of meaningful, trusted connections with other people. These findings are based on our research with more than 100 professionals across all organizational levels from a wide range of industries and geographies, as well as work with coaching professionals specifically.

Consider Mitan, a financial analyst at a consulting firm. Mitan's manager told him he needed "more gravitas" and specifically that he needed "to stand out more in the room and connect with clients more quickly and effectively." Mitan regarded

HBR STAFF/ARTEM HVOZDKOV/GETTY IMAGES

Gravitas increases your ability to persuade and influence and will probably fuel the extent to which you rise in an organization.

his boss as charismatic but didn't see himself that way, so he was annoyed and disheartened. "I've never been someone who wants to be the center of attention," he says.

But through coaching, Mitan was able to find a few techniques that actually felt right for him. The starting point was acknowledging that being able to connect with clients *was* part of his role. On the basis of more-specific feedback from his boss and other colleagues, we set a new, specific goal for him: asking his clients about parts of their businesses he didn't know much about, even though it felt safer for him to stick to topics he was more familiar with. Although Mitan was committed to this idea, he didn't feel particularly confident. Still, he was surprised by how quickly his clients responded to his new approach, becoming more open with him about their challenges. That enabled Mitan to create new solutions for them, further driving their appreciation for him, and his own self-confidence.

Drawing on Mitan's story and many others like his, here are five ways to increase your authentic gravitas:

1. Be clear with yourself about what you want. If you're explicit with your values and goals, you are more likely to act in ways that support them. Ask yourself, If someone were to describe me to others, what would I want them to say? Or, like Mitan, set a specific goal that relates to your work and find your own ways to achieve it that are in line with your personal values.

2. Be open to feedback. None of us achieve our intentions every time. But when our espoused values and commitments don't align with the experience others have of us, it can undermine our ability to build trust and meaningful connections. Great leaders proactively seek to discover what others' experiences of them are, take responsibility for them, and learn from them.

For example, in addition to reflecting on feedback from his company's annual 360-degree reviews, James, a senior manager in banking, asks his team quarterly in one-on-ones: "What could I do differently to make my leadership and our working relationship more effective?" He asks his team and peers for real-time feedback after any meetings or presentations. When he gets a cursory response—"No, that was great. You were excellent"—he pushes back: "Thank you, *and* what are two or three things I could do differently next time to be better?" This feedback lets James know whether he's having the impact he intends—and builds his relationships with others.

3. Create time for broader conversations. It's easy to rush from meeting to meeting and agenda to agenda (especially when working virtually). The danger is that we miss what's going on with the people we're working with. What matters most to them right now? What are they excited about? What opportunities do they see? What are they concerned about? Choosing curiosity over efficiency gives you stronger connections and information you can use to have a bigger impact.

Carve out small windows of time between small talk and specific agenda points to find out what's going on with and motivating the people you're working with. This can be simple: "Before we get into the details, it would be great to hear how things are going for you—any changes since we last spoke, your priorities right now, the biggest challenges you're facing." The conversation doesn't need to be long—it just needs to be meaningful. You may feel that you're being nosy, but whether it's with colleagues or clients, when you ask these questions with genuine interest, they tend to be well received.

This practice "has completely changed my work," one senior leader says, describing how it helped her become more influential and better at driving collaboration. She earned more trust in her relationships, she was able to bring peers from different parts of the business into projects to benefit her clients, and she was better able to see opportunities to work with peers to offer solutions to complex problems.

4. Beware the self-fulfilling prophecy of "needing more confidence." Jennifer, a senior analyst in a professional services firm, works extremely hard and is well regarded by her peers. She describes what she regarded to be her greatest professional obstacle: "I'm not confident enough. I should be more confident, I know, but I'm just not." Because people often assume confidence is a critical aspect of gravitas, it's usually a big barrier for those who feel they lack it—because they believe they must pretend to get it. What's more, telling yourself you

don't have enough confidence can be a vicious cycle, with that negative self-talk decreasing your confidence further.

However, we found that professionals we studied who were considered by others to have gravitas didn't always feel confident—far from it. They did, however, choose to be courageous, acting in pursuit of their goals even though they perceive risks and threats.

For example, Sarah, a leader in a fintech company, was described by others as confident. But she is regularly nervous and feels out of her comfort zone in her fast-paced environment. She says that in the mornings she often looks in the mirror and gives herself a pep talk: "You can do this. You've got this." Rather than faking confidence, she is clear with herself about her vulnerability and need for courage. From the outside we can wrongly interpret courageous behaviors as stemming from innate confidence. Instead, confidence can often grow from these acts of courage.

5. Commit to integrity. Research has suggested that in addition to courage, integrity is one of the strongest virtuous predictors of C-level effectiveness. Furthermore, studies show that that integrity actually fuels courage. As we commit to integrity, we ignite our ability to speak up when it's not comfortable and to share our views that might be different and therefore risky. In doing so, we increase the extent to which we positively stand out at work, and we can do so with authenticity.

The best kind of gravitas comes from this authenticity, from deep interpersonal trust that you build by being clear about the impact you want to make on others, empathizing and finding out about the people you work with, and adhering to your sense of integrity. You can increase your gravitas and still be *you*.

Originally published on HBR.org September 24, 2020

HBR Reprint H05VOJ

Rebecca Newton *is an organizational psychologist and senior visiting fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science and faculty member on executive education programs at Harvard Law School. She is the CEO of leadership consulting firm CoachAdvisor and author of* Authentic Gravitas: Who Stands Out and Why *(TarcherPerigee, 2019).*

RICHARD NEWSTEAD/GETTY IMAGES

3. Impostor Syndrome Has Its Advantages

→ by EBEN HARRELL

BASIMA A. TEWFIK, an assistant professor at MIT Sloan, ran two field studies and two experiments examining employees who have "impostor syndrome"—commonly thought of as the feeling of being inadequate and a fraud despite a reputation for success at work. She discovered that these individuals adopted a more other-focused orientation in their social interactions. As a result they were rated as more interpersonally effective. The conclusion: Impostor syndrome has its advantages.

The right amount of impostor thoughts may provide just enough motivation to bring out your best work.

Professor Tewfik, defend your research.

TEWFIK: People familiar with impostor syndrome tend to think that it's uniformly harmful. To be sure, the belief that you're not as competent as others think you are could certainly make you anxious and lower your self-esteem. But there's an upside too. My research shows that experiencing this phenomenon can make you more adept at relationships, which is a key ingredient in career success. In one study doctors in training who had more-frequent impostor thoughts were significantly better at handling sensitive interactions with patients, which led those patients to give them higher interpersonal-skill ratings. In another study job candidates primed to have more impostor thoughts asked more questions during informal preinterview chats and as a result were viewed by hiring managers as having better people skills. Essentially, impostor thoughts make you more "other oriented"—more attuned to other people's perceptions and feelings—which makes you more likable. In addition, impostor thoughts didn't seem to hurt performance—at least not in my samples. Doctors who had more of them were just as likely as other doctors to give correct diagnoses, and job candidates who had more of them were just as likely to be invited for an interview after their chats with hiring managers.

HBR: So it's OK—maybe even good—to have impostor syndrome?

I wouldn't go so far as to say "good," but one of my goals with this research was to remove some of the stigma and give a more balanced view. I hope that this work can help people dampen the initial stress and anxiety that come with impostor thoughts by showing that there is this interpersonal silver lining. It's OK to have impostor thoughts sometimes. It's not a "syndrome" or a pathology.

But surely these thoughts do hurt your performance even if they enhance how other people view you interpersonally—especially in high-stakes jobs? I'm thinking of athletes, military officers, litigators, and CEOs.

Interestingly, to date there's no empirical quantitative evidence that impostor thoughts degrade performance. Yet this notion persists. Psychologists often point to something called the Yerkes-Dodson stress performance curve, which shows that a few nerves—up to a point—improve performance. It may be that having the right amount of impostor thoughts can provide just enough motivation to bring out your best work. It's an open question.

How do you determine whether someone has impostor syndrome—and to what extent? In the study with doctors, for example, how did you know which doctors had it?

This question actually gets to the start of it all for me. Early on, in graduate school, I came to the realization that what researchers have been studying and calling impostor syndrome or impostor phenomenon over the past few decades was indistinguishable from fear. And if fear is what we've been studying, it's no wonder we think that experiencing it is all bad news.

So we needed to measure it in a way that actually captures its defining characteristic: the belief that others overestimate your competence. I used seven lab and field samples involving more than 1,000 people to develop and validate a new five-item psychological survey measure. Specifically, I ask people to indicate how frequently they entertain thoughts such as *People important to me think I am more capable than I think I am* or *Others think I have more knowledge than I think I do when they're at work*.

In the experiment with job applicants, how did you make people feel like impostors, and how quickly did that affect their behavior?

I asked the employees randomly assigned to that group to reflect on a time in which they had impostor thoughts at work, while the control group considered a time when others saw them as they saw themselves or, in a second experiment, what they had for lunch. Immediately after those reflection periods, people in the impostor condition behaved differently from those in the control group: They started asking more questions.

Should we all be priming ourselves to have impostor thoughts? In other words, did Stuart Smalley from the 1990s *Saturday Night Live* sketch get it wrong? Instead of mantras like "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me," should our self-talk be more like "I don't think I'm good enough, I don't think I'm smart enough, but I'm

not going to worry because that insecurity will make people like me"?
Ha! I definitely do not think we should be intentionally inducing impostor thoughts. There are probably better interventions to help you form stronger professional relationships. Rather, I hope the takeaway from this research is that when you do find yourself having these thoughts—as you may from time to time—you shouldn't compound the stress that comes with them by also thinking that they're necessarily going to cause you to do poorly at work.

How many of us have impostor syndrome?
A frequently cited statistic suggests that nearly 70% of people have entertained impostor thoughts at least at one point in their careers. These thoughts tend to come to a peak when you're facing a new challenge, starting a new job, or encountering new tasks after a promotion.

Do women and people of color have impostor thoughts more frequently?
In all my studies—and this has been backed up by other researchers—I don't find significant differences. That is, white men seem to experience just as many impostor thoughts as women and people of color do. When people point to the impostor phenomenon in underrepresented groups, I think they're conflating it with something more insidious: a lack of belonging. A true impostor thought is *My colleagues think I'm smarter than I am*. It's not *I think other people question whether I belong here or think I'm not smart enough*.

In fact, if managers hear an employee from a minority group expressing what sounds like impostor thoughts, they might want to check to see if there is an inclusion problem. Maybe the minority employee is operating in a hostile, biased work environment.

Isn't there a risk that knowing the upside of impostor syndrome will stop you from feeling like an impostor?
It's a good question. If you focus on the fact that your impostor thoughts will push you to compensate interpersonally, which gets people to see you as more socially skilled, does that eventually diminish your thoughts and the benefits they provide? We'll need more research, but I suspect that this knowledge wouldn't eliminate your impostor thoughts entirely. Even extremely successful people like Albert Einstein, former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, and the writer Maya Angelou publicly admitted to having impostor thoughts from time to time. I suspect that there will always be powerful environmental triggers that bring them on.

Originally published in Harvard Business Review, *May–June 2022*

HBR Reprint F2203B

Eben Harrell *is a senior editor at* Harvard Business Review.

Analysis you can trust.

Read the latest research-based thought leadership from Harvard Business Review Analytic Services. Access business intelligence and peer-group insight from the HBR Advisory Council global research panel and from subject matter experts on today's most pressing management topics.

Harvard Business Review
ANALYTIC SERVICES

RECENTLY PUBLISHED

White Papers

Partnering in Complex Times: Turning to the Experts for Best-In-Class Customer Experience
Sponsored by Teleperformance

Sharing People Data Outside HR to Drive Business Value
Sponsored by Visier

The Role of Speed and Technology in the Evolution of M&A
Sponsored by Datasite

Optimizing Machine Learning-Driven Business Outcomes by Adopting MLOps
Sponsored by Capital One

Rethinking Customer Engagement in the Era of Delight
Sponsored by Freshworks

Navigating the Data Deluge
Sponsored by NTT DATA

Briefing Papers

Creating a Successful Plan to Electrify Transportation Infrastructure
Sponsored by Schneider Electric

Using Data-Driven Insights to Address Workforce Shortages in Health Care
Sponsored by Philips

Webinars

Building a Culture that Supports Employee Mental Health
Sponsored by Siemens Energy

Embracing Change for Future Growth and Innovation
Sponsored by SAP

Research Report

Taming IT Complexity through Effective Strategies and Partnerships
Sponsored by Broadcom Software

Pulse Reports

Changes Ahead for B2B Customer Service in a Digitally Driven World
Sponsored by SAP

Achieving Growth with Positive Product Experiences
Sponsored by Gainsight

Driving Adoption of Emerging Technologies in Latin America
Sponsored by NTT Data

hbr.org/hbr-analytic-services

Access these and hundreds of other reports and white papers in the research archive.

Register for the HBR Advisory Council: hbr.org/advisory-council/register.

Executive Summaries

"Leading and stepping into that leadership is 'Welcome to the not knowing.'"

STRETCH RESPONSIBILITIES
PAGE 80

Fix the System

The Dangers of Feeling Like a Fake

Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries | page 10

In many walks of life—and business is no exception—there are high achievers who believe that they are complete fakes. To the outside observer, these individuals appear to be remarkably accomplished; often they are extremely successful leaders with staggering lists of achievements.

These *neurotic impostors*—as psychologists call them—are not guilty of false humility. The sense of being a fraud is the flip side of giftedness and causes a great many talented, hardworking, and capable leaders to believe that they don't deserve their success. "Bluffing" their way through life (as they see it), they are haunted by the constant fear of exposure. With every success, they think, "I was lucky *this* time, fooling everyone, but will my luck hold? When will people discover that I'm not up to the job?"

In his career as a management professor, consultant, leadership coach, and psychoanalyst, Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries has found neurotic impostors at all levels of organizations. In this article, he explores the subject of neurotic imposture and outlines its classic symptoms: fear of failure, fear of success, perfectionism, procrastination, and workaholism. He then describes how perfectionist overachievers can damage their careers, their colleagues' morale, and the bottom line by allowing anxiety to trigger self-handicapping behavior and cripple the very organizations they're trying so hard to please. Finally, Kets de Vries offers advice on how to limit the incidence of neurotic imposture and mitigate its damage through discreet vigilance, appropriate intervention, and constructive support.

HBR Reprint R0509F

Boost Your Confidence

How High Achievers Overcome Their Anxiety

Morra Aarons-Mele | page 38

A surprising number of extremely successful people are often wracked by anxiety, the author writes. They suffer from what psychologists call *thought traps* and others might refer to as *cognitive distortion* or *thinking errors:* negatively biased and untrue patterns of thought that arrive automatically and often ensnare us, preventing us from seeing clearly, communicating effectively, or making good reality-based decisions. To combat thought traps, some anxious achievers turn to overwork, others to coping mechanisms such as substance use, avoidance, or passive-aggressiveness. Aarons-Mele explains the 11 most common thought traps—all-or-nothing thinking, labeling, jumping to conclusions, catastrophizing, filtering, discounting the positive, "should" statements, social comparison, personalization and blaming, ruminating, and emotional reasoning—and recommends strategies for overcoming all of them.

HBR Reprint R2302L

Build Your Credibility

In Praise of the Incomplete Leader

Deborah Ancona, Thomas W. Malone, Wanda J. Orlikowski, and Peter M. Senge
page 44

Today's top executives are expected to do everything right, from coming up with solutions to complex problems to having the charisma and prescience to rally stakeholders around a perfect vision of the future. But no one leader can be all things to all people.

It's time to end the myth of the complete leader. Those at the top must understand their weaknesses *and* their strengths. Only by acknowledging what they lack can leaders fill in the gaps with others' skills. The incomplete leader has the confidence and humility to recognize unique talents and perspectives throughout the organization—and to let those qualities shine.

The authors' work studying leadership has led them to develop a framework of distributed leadership. Within that model, leadership consists of four capabilities: sensemaking, relating, "visioning," and inventing. Sensemaking involves understanding and mapping the context in which a company and its people operate. A leader skilled in this can quickly identify the complexities of a given situation and explain them to others. The second capability, relating, means being able to build trusting relationships through inquiring (listening with intention), advocating (explaining one's own point of view), and connecting (establishing a network of allies who can help a leader accomplish his or her goals). Visioning, the third capability, means coming up with a compelling image of the future. It is a collaborative process that articulates what the members of an organization want to create. Finally, inventing involves developing new ways to bring that vision to life.

Rarely will one person be skilled in all four areas. So it's critical that leaders find others who can offset their limitations and complement their strengths. Those who don't will not only bear the burden of leadership alone but will find themselves at the helm of an unbalanced ship.

HBR Reprint R0702E

Becoming the Boss

Linda A. Hill | page 70

Even for the most gifted individuals, the process of becoming a leader is an arduous, albeit rewarding, journey of continuous learning and self-development. The initial test along the path is so fundamental that we often overlook it: becoming a boss for the first time. That's a shame, because the trials involved in this rite of passage have serious consequences for both the individual and the organization.

For a decade and a half, the author has studied people—particularly star performers—making major career transitions to management. As firms have become leaner and more dynamic, new managers have described a transition that gets more difficult all the time. But the transition is often harder than it need be because of managers' misconceptions about their role. Those who can acknowledge their misconceptions have a far greater chance of success.

For example, new managers typically assume that their position will give them the authority and freedom to do what they think is best. Instead, they find themselves enmeshed in a web of relationships with subordinates, bosses, peers, and others, all of whom make relentless and often conflicting demands. "You really are not in control of anything," says one new manager.

Another misconception is that new managers are responsible only for making sure that their operations run smoothly. But new managers also need to realize they are responsible for recommending and initiating changes—some of them in areas outside their purview—that will enhance their groups' performance.

Many new managers are reluctant to ask for help from their bosses. But when they do ask (often because of a looming crisis), they are relieved to find their superiors more tolerant of their questions and mistakes than they had expected.

HBR Reprint R0701D

Harvard Business Review

Don't let your writing hold you back.

When you're fumbling for words and pressed for time, you might be tempted to dismiss good business writing as a luxury. But it's a skill you must cultivate in order to succeed. The **HBR Guide to Better Business Writing** gives you the tools you need to express your ideas clearly and persuasively so clients, colleagues, stakeholders, and partners will get behind them.

HBR Guide to Better Business Writing
PRODUCT #10946

store.hbr.org
1-800-988-0886 OR +1-617-783-7500

Executive Summaries

Build Your Credibility

Stretch Responsibilities

A podcast interview with Jerry Colonna, hosted by Alison Beard and Dan McGinn
page 80

Taking on a new workplace role—whether a brand-new job, a promotion, or leading a team for the first time—can be unsettling. As you face unfamiliar responsibilities and perhaps even colleagues looking to you for direction, it can be easy to feel like a fraud.

But there are ways to combat impostor syndrome, even when you are outside of your comfort zone. In this episode of HBR's advice podcast, *Dear HBR:,* cohosts Alison Beard and Dan McGinn answer reader questions with the help of Jerry Colonna, a professional coach, former venture capitalist, and the author of the book *Reboot: Leadership and the Art of Growing Up.*

They talk through what to do when you don't feel qualified for your new role, such as acknowledging your inexperience and asking smart questions or proactively seeking further training and information. Understand that what you're feeling is universal, and embrace the chance for self-growth. Instead of wondering when your coworkers are going to "see through you," recognize that your boss and others believe in you—or you wouldn't have been given this stretch opportunity. Establish regular check-ins with your boss, and make a plan to generate some early wins to help you develop confidence in your new role. Above all, be authentic, listen, and ask questions—you will gain assurance and generate trust among your colleagues.

Originally aired on Dear HBR:
June 13, 2019

Be Yourself

The Authenticity Paradox

Herminia Ibarra | page 94

Authenticity has become the gold standard for leadership. But as INSEAD professor Herminia Ibarra argues, a simplistic understanding of what authenticity means can limit leaders' growth and impact.

All too often, we tend to latch on to authenticity as an excuse for sticking with what's comfortable. But few jobs allow us to do that for long. In this article, Ibarra explains how leaders can develop an "adaptively authentic" style by experimenting with many different leadership approaches. It's OK to change tactics from one day to the next, she says. That's not being fake; it's how we figure out what's right for the challenges and circumstances we face.

Three strategies can help you break free from a self-concept that's too rigid:

Learn from diverse role models. Growth necessarily involves some form of imitation, but don't copy just one person's leadership style. Borrow selectively from various people to create your own collage.

Work on getting better. Set learning goals—not just performance targets—to focus on the value of experimentation. Stretch the limits of who you are by doing new things that make you uncomfortable but help you discover by direct experience whom you want to become.

Don't stick to "your story." Jettison outdated self-concepts and draw on personal narratives that fit your circumstances as you're taking on new challenges.

HBR Reprint R1501C

Lead with Authenticity

A podcast interview with Tina Opie and Candice Morgan, hosted by Amy Bernstein, Sarah Green Carmichael, and Nicole Torres | page 102

Do you feel like your true self at work? Or is going to work like putting on a mask? Some of us feel the weight of that mask figuratively ("I feel like an impostor, so I'd better fake it 'til I make it"), while for others it might be more literal ("Time to go to work...better put on makeup, straighten my hair, and smile").

As leaders, we know we're supposed to be authentic, but for women, especially women of color, that can be tricky. For one thing, with all the demands competing for our attention it can be hard to even appreciate our "true selves" and what we really want. For another, there are different expectations about how professional women should look and behave.

In this episode of HBR's podcast *Women at Work,* cohosts Amy Bernstein, Sarah Green Carmichael, and Nicole Torres talk with Babson professor Tina Opie, an expert on authenticity, and DEI professional Candice Morgan, who describes how she built a culture of belonging at Pinterest, where she was the head of diversity. The hosts also discuss what it took for them to feel comfortable in new roles.

The conversations cover issues such as impostor syndrome, belonging uncertainty, and unconscious bias and gender stereotypes. Topics include the professional uniform (such as attire and hairstyle), identity, expression in the workplace (being polite vs. being direct), and the impact of cultural upbringing. To start with, says Bernstein, "when you think about authenticity, you have to try on different personas to see which one feels comfortable."

Originally aired on Women at Work
February 9, 2018

CSC:Miami

Content Supply Chains must be forensic in their detail.

Television broadcasters have long relied on instinct, market knowledge and spreadsheets to forecast TV viewership - but instinct needs to partner with information; market knowledge is never enough; and spreadsheets are no way to excel.

As witness to these challenges, Fractal undertook its own detective work.

By combining AI, data engineering and user-centric design, Fractal created an industry-first TV forecasting system for Europe's leading media and entertainment company. The result? Up to 30% improvement in forecast accuracy.

Fractal: perfectly targeted and timed TV, no drama.

fractal

HERMÈS
PARIS
Hermès,
cavalier jewelry
Publicis EtNous