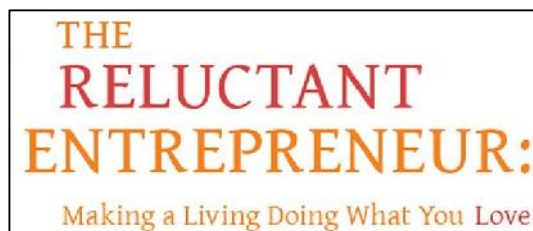


Extracted from:



Chapter 3: The Mind of an Entrepreneur

The Imposter Syndrome

"Hi. I'm Mary Ellen and I'm faking it."

No, I'm not going to put that on a conference name badge, but if I did, I know a lot of people would sidle up to me and admit that they, too, are faking it. We're the people who, at one time or another, suffer from what is known as the Imposter Syndrome. Do you worry that people will finally realize that you're not the smart, capable expert they once thought you were? Do you think that your success is due to luck or a fluke rather than because you are an astute business owner? Do you obsess about making a mistake and interpret any constructive criticism as further proof of your incompetence?

Many of us suffer from this fear of someone finally discovering that we have no particular skills or abilities—that what we're doing is so easy that anyone could do it. In fact, what often causes the Imposter Syndrome is our undervaluing of our own innate talents and gifts. If something comes naturally to us, we assume that it must be easy for everyone and that we would look foolish for bragging about it.

The people most likely to experience the Imposter Syndrome often seem to be high achievers, those labeled as "gifted" as children, and those who have very specialized skills. From my own experience, it appears that a lot of reluctant entrepreneurs fit that profile. In fact, one of the appeals of being our own boss is that we don't have to worry about co-workers finally discovering that we're the frauds we believe we really are.

These feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy may never disappear entirely, but you can learn to recognize them when they show up and counteract them. Here are a few techniques that can help.

- Avoid using words like “only” or “just” when describing or thinking about your expertise and background.
- Don't apologize for yourself or insult yourself. Don't attribute to luck what you created yourself by recognizing an opportunity.
- Trust your clients' judgment. Are you truly surrounded by such foolish people that no one sees the true you? Perhaps it's more likely that their evaluation of you is as accurate as their evaluation of others.
- Give yourself a pep talk. Say things like, “I love taking on a challenge” or “I know I can figure this out as I go along” or “It will get easier each time I do this.”

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